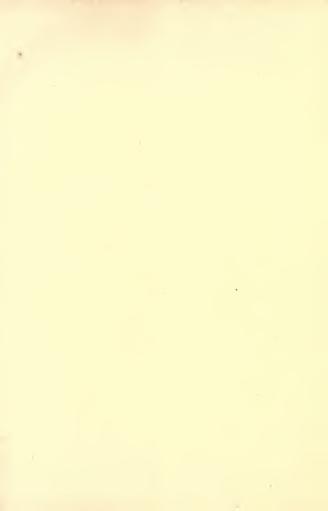




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Page 4.

MAUD SUMMERS

THE SIGHTLESS.

A NARRATIVE FOR THE YOUNG.

"No life falls fruitless: none can tell How vast its power may be, Nor what results unfolded lie Within it silently,"

Mith Illustrations by John Absolon.

LONDON:

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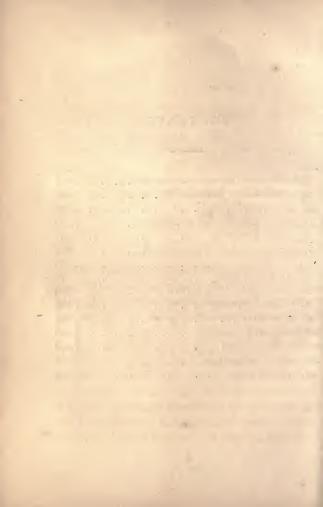
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MAUD SUMMERS THE SIGHTLESS.

CHAPTER I.

THE BANK UNDER THE BEECH-TREE.

"Where the purple violet grows, Where the bubbling water flows, Where the grass is fresh and fine."—Children's Song.

Under the shade of a venerable beech-tree, which stood on the outskirts of a small wood, two little girls were seated on a fine morning in the early summer. They had chosen a very pretty spot for their resting-place, for the bank on which they sat was covered with bright green moss, which made it as soft as a velvet cushion, and the yellow primroses were peeping out from it here and there. There were many bees flying about among the blossoms of the tree above them, and they kept up a constant humming which was quite as pretty in its way as the music which the birds were making in the wood behind. Butter-

flies, too, found something that they liked in the flowers, and were as restless, though not quite so noisy, as the hard-working bees. There was a little stream also at no great distance, which made much babbling as it tumbled along over the stones and pebbles,—and a very refreshing sound it was upon such a day, making one feel cooler only to hear it. Altogether it was a very pleasant place; and if I had been choosing a spot for a holiday excursion or a gipsy-party, I do not know of one that I should have preferred to this,—the old beech at Broadlands, as it was called.

"There are some violets not far off, Ellen," said one of the children,—"let us make a posy; I do so love violets."

Ellen looked carefully round without discovering any.

"I think you must be mistaken, Maudie dear; I cannot see any sign of them."

"Oh, yes, I can smell them quite distinctly. That way,"—and she pointed with her hand. "You did not go far enough."

Ellen set off in that direction, and after some search found a large patch of beautiful violets, white and purple mingled together. She came back delighted, and taking her companion by the hand, led her to the spot.

If you had seen how carefully she chose the way-how she went some distance round, instead of taking Maud across that narrow ditch which she herself had stepped over so easily just before -how she warned her to take care when they were passing through the furze, you would have wondered what was the matter with Maud, that she should require so much attention. She was quite as tall as Ellen; she did not look more delicate in health; and yet Ellen was as careful of her as if she had been a little sickly child. If you had asked Ellen, she would have told you that poor Maudie was blind. Her eyes were not closed up, like those of some blind persons; they were as wide open, though not quite so bright, as her companion's. To an ordinary observer there was no evident sign of disease to be traced in them; but if you looked at them carefully, you would see that they did not move from one object to another, as your own eyes would do, but they seemed to look straight at one thing. When she spoke, she did not turn her eyes towards you; she always looked before her, as if she saw something a long way off,—so that, although her eyes were open, and although they were pretty, yet you would soon have seen that they had no sight in them.

When the two girls reached the violets, Maud sat down on the grass, and began to make a fragrant nosegay. Her little fingers moved very busily amongst the flowers, feeling them out, and separating them from the grass and dried leaves which mingled with them; and in a short time she had collected quite a large handful, much larger than Ellen had gathered, for she was continually seeing something a little way off that she must go and examine; -now a large cowslip, brighter and more full of flowers than any that were near her,-now something in a furze bush that looked like a bird's nest, but which turned out on examination to be a root of dried grass,-and now a playful squirrel, that sat very quietly till she came near, and then darted swiftly up the nearest tree, and peered down with saucy eyes upon her from behind the branches. Ellen was always coming back from these short excursions with some new adventure to describe to her patient little friend, who went

on with her violet gathering, singing to herself meanwhile with a voice as sweet and cheerful as the little birds that made such merry music around her.

At last, Ellen got tired and hot with her running and racing, and Maud had almost filled her hat with violets,-more than enough for both of them; and so they returned to their old seat under the beech-tree, and Ellen bathed her hot face in the brook (for she didn't mind, she said, if it did make her sunburnt). Then she saw in the field beyond the brook some large rings of greener and stronger grass than the rest; and she came and told Maud what old Mary Green had said about them,—that they were fairy-rings, and that the fairies came sometimes at night, and danced round them hand in hand. Perhaps Mary Green believed that this was true, but Maud and Ellen did not; yet it was a very pleasant and amusing thing to talk about,-those funny little men and women, dressed in bright green, who only came on moonlight nights, and went away before day-break. And Ellen thought she should like to see them, but was not quite sure that she would not be afraid; and Maud, though more timid than Ellen, was sure she would like to see them, because then she would not be blind. And so they laughed and chatted like such children do, and everything they thought of gave them something new to talk about, and some fresh subject for mirth and merriment.

For some time they were very happy, till the sun got straight over their heads, and the shadow of the old beech-tree was no larger round than the old beech-tree itself. Then they knew that it was noon-day, and they began to feel hungry, and people cannot be happy when they are hungry and have nothing to eat.

"I wonder Mr. Ashton does not come," said Ellen; "it must be past the time when he said he would be here."

Just as she spoke, a short bark was heard behind her; and in a moment a cold, damp nose was pushed into her face, and two pairs of dirty little paws began to make sad work upon her clean muslin dress.

"Oh! get down, do, you naughty Bustle; wipe your feet, sir, before you dare to come near me! Look here, what dirty marks you have made!"

Bustle did not look very much ashamed, but he rubbed his feet upon the dry grass, and then ventured to come up to Maud, and give her a kiss after his curious fashion.

Bustle was a rough little dog, with sandy hair, so long, that often when he had been indulging in his frequent romps, you could hardly tell at which end his head was situated. There never was a dog fonder of fun than Bustle; he would play all sorts of antics upon the most trifling occasion, turning head over heels, standing on his hind legs, scratching at the ground as if cakes by dozens were buried below, scrambling half-way up a tree, and then tumbling down headlong with a bump that made you quite feel for him; finally scampering off out of sight after some imaginary object, and returning with his long tongue drooping out, and in such a state of panting and confusion that it would take an hour of rest and attention to make him at all decent again. As you may suppose, he was a great favourite with both Maud and Ellen, though he was so much more gentle with the blind girl, that it seemed almost as if he knew of her infirmity. Ellen was fond of making him go through his accomplishments for Maud's sake; for though she could not see them, yet his barking, and racing, and scrambling, always amused her extremely.

Bustle was very soon followed by his master, Mr. Ashton, an elderly gentleman, with long grey hair, and a pleasant smile on his face. The girls were very pleased at his coming, particularly as he carried in his hand the basket that contained their luncheon, which they were going to take, as they often did in the fine summer weather, under the old beech-tree. He took his seat beside Maud, who playfully drew out a handful of violets from her hat, and sprinkled them over his knees, telling him how very busy they had been, and what a beautiful posy they had gathered, and how they were just wishing for him to come, because they were so hungry. So he opened the basket immediately, and bringing out some nice eatables, they were very soon engaged in satisfying their hunger.

It was an amusing sight to watch the doings of little Bustle while this repast was going on, —how very earnestly his bright eyes looked from one to the other, and watched every

morsel which they raised to their lips, he standing on his hind legs and whining all the time; and how, whenever he got a piece, he shook himself with a short grunt of gratitude, and began to beg as pitifully as before. There are many dogs, no doubt, that go through their performances far more amusingly than Bustle did; but Ellen thought, and even poor blind Maudie thought, that no other dog living could acquit himself so well as he.

"I have had a letter about you this morning, Maud," said Mr. Ashton; "whom do you think it came from?"

"About me, grandpapa? Then it must have come from dear mamma."

"You are right, my child; it came from her. Your parents send their kindest love and kisses to you, and so does your little brother Arthur, whom you have never known. Your mamma is longing for the time to come when she can see you again, though she says it will not be for two or three years yet. She is very pleased, however, to know that you are so well and happy. Her letter speaks about this very place where we are now sitting and talking of her.

She says how dearly she would like to meet us all again under the old beech-tree, where she and I and your papa have spent so many happy hours together. Let us hope that her wish will some day be granted."

"Does mamma say anything about my sight, grandpapa? Does she say anything more of what Dr. Pirie told you when you took me to London?"

"Of the operation, my dear? Your parents are very hopeful about it, but are still willing that it should be put off till they come home. I am very pleased that they do think so, for I should like them to be with you, if you have to undergo this. So you see, it is all for the best, Maudie; and we must continue to pray, as we always do, for the safe and speedy return of your dear parents."

"So we will," answered Maud; "and I know that they love me so much, that they will be sure to choose what is good for me. If they think proper to let Dr. Pirie try if he can do my blindness any good, I am sure that I am quite willing and ready. If it pains me ever so much I will not complain; for if my parents did not

love me, they would not care whether I were blind or not,—would they, grandpapa?"

"Certainly not, Maud; and in this your earthly parents are like your great Father who is in heaven. They would put you to a little pain that you might be better for it all your lifetime; and in the same way God often sends pain and trouble upon His children, that these may make them ready for some great blessing. It makes it easy for us to bear the smart, when we think about the good things that are to follow."

"Oh, yes," she replied, "I could bear anything

bravely, if it would only give me my sight."

"And now, my girls," said Mr. Ashton, "I think we must bend our steps towards home, or we shall have Ellen's papa coming to see what has become of her."

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CHAPTER II.

MAUD'S FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

"Oh, I can feel the blessed sun,
Mirth, music, tears that fall,
And darkness sad, and joy, and woe,
And nature's movements all !—
But I must image them in mind;
I cannot see them—I am blind."—Nichol.

But we must go back a little in our history, and give the reader some fuller description of the persons we have spoken of in the previous chapter.

There was a path across the fields between Broadlands wood and the residence of Mr. Ashton, which was a pretty little house, standing in its own grounds, a few hundred yards from the village. Mr. Ashton had been, in his early life, a naval officer, and in addition to having travelled nearly over the world, he had been engaged in several battles. In the course of his dangerous adventures, he had received some wounds, the chief of which was the loss of his left hand just above the wrist,—it had been

shot away by a cannon-ball. He wore his coatsleeve turned back over the stump, and used often to say, jokingly, that if he could find any man who had lost his right hand, they might make one pair of gloves do between them. When he retired from service upon his half-pay, he purchased this little house at Springfield (that was the name of the village), with the intention of settling down there for the rest of his life. His wife had died some years before, and the sole relative that he brought with him was an only surviving child and daughter, who acted as his housekeeper and companion. He had been there about five years, when she married Mr. Summers, a gentleman in the Indian civil service, and shortly after accompanied her husband when he returned to his post in Calcutta. Thus Mr. Ashton, now advanced in years, was left without a companion; but being of an active turn of mind, he soon found plenty of things to occupy his attention, and fill up his time. An industrious and energetic person will never suffer from dulness and low spirits for any long period; and even if he is left alone, as Mr. Ashton was, he will always find the means of

useful amusement. So he employed himself in laying out the little grounds about the house, in planting a shrubbery, and arranging for the construction of a greenhouse; and when these were all in good order, he took under his own management the farm-land and meadows which belonged to the house. He got a good stock of poultry, looked after the cows and sheep, watched with pleasure and interest the progress of the crops, busied himself in the harvest, and in a few years became as good a farmer in a small way as any in the neighbourhood. Broadlands wood, which we have spoken of, was the boundary of his farm, and the old beech-tree was a prominent object in the view from the best bedroom window. While his daughter remained with him, she was in the habit of walking as far as this spot every day, when the weather permitted; and so, when she had gone to India, her father thought more of this old tree than he would otherwise have done, and had the path to it kept clean and level. It went through one arable field; but when the men were ploughing in the spring, though the path was in the way, he would

never let them cut it up,—it was to be preserved in memory of his distant child.

Mr. Ashton soon became good friends with the vicar, Mr. Ansted, for he was anxious to employ some of his spare time in visiting the sick and poor in the parish, and the vicar gladly accepted his offer. He was naturally kindhearted and benevolent, and the knowledge of men and their ways which he had gained in his long experience made him sympathizing to the weak, and gentle even with the wicked and froward. He soon gained the esteem and affection of the poor people of Springfield; and being always ready to help them in their troubles with advice or relief, they regarded him as a true benefactor. Mr. Ansted used laughingly to call him his "lay-curate," and indeed his help was worth much to him in his poor and widelyscattered parish.

Two years had elapsed from the time of his daughter's departure, when he received a letter, announcing the birth of a little girl, whom they had christened Maud. In that and one or two following letters, the fond mother described the beauty of her little babe, her robust health, and

her daily progress in strength and infantine graces; and old Mr. Ashton, now a grandparent, pleased himself by thinking of all this, and wondered whether he should ever live to see her. But soon Mrs. Summers began to express her fears respecting her infant's sight; her eyes were large and blue, she said, but they did not seem to observe what passed before them; if a hand or handkerchief were waved to and fro close to her face, she did not shrink from it, and did not close her eyes. The doctors thought that perhaps it might be only temporary, and ordered little Maud to be kept from the sun as much as possible, and Mrs. Summers built much upon the hope which they gave her. But as the child advanced in intelligence, it became more and more evident that she was quite blind. The pretty eyes took no notice of anything-they were devoid of all expression—they were of no use to the unfortunate girl. When she began to talk, this was almost the first idea that she was able to express, no doubt from hearing people so constantly speak of it in her presence;—she would put her fingers to her eyes, and say, "Blind! blind!" As she grew older, her childish beauty and her affliction together rendered her a great favourite in the station where her friends resided. She used to go wandering about, holding the hand of her ayah, or native nurse; and whenever any one spoke kindly to her, or stroked her curly head, she said,

"I cannot see you, dear friend-I am blind!"

When Maud was about eight years old, it appeared to her parents to be the best course to send her to England, that her education might be attended to, as far as a blind girl could be educated; and also that her eyes might be examined by the best oculists, to see if anything could be done to remedy her sad infirmity. She came to this country under the charge of some friends of her parents, who were returning home, and took up her abode at once with her grandfather at Springfield. It was not to be wondered at that a very warm attachment speedily sprung up between them. The fact of her being the child of his beloved daughter would have been enough of itself to gain for her a place in his affections; but he soon loved her for her own sake too-for her cheerful and kindly disposition, for her amiable temper, and loving heart. Of course, her blindness rendered her almost entirely dependent upon her friends for amusement and comfort; but she was so grateful for any act of kindness, and so careful to avoid giving unnecessary trouble, that they took the greater pleasure in attending to her wants. Mrs. Jackson, the housekeeper, a woman of rather rough manners but kindly heart, had been a little out of temper when she found that Mr. Ashton was going to have his granddaughter to live with him. A child of eight years old, she thought, would give her an immense deal of trouble, and being blind, was sure to be spoiled and fretful -and, indeed, she didn't know how she could put up with it. But Maud's appearance soon banished every feeling of this sort from Mrs. Jackson's mind; and she became, from the very first, one of her kindest friends-tender as a nurse with her, however rough and impatient she might be with some.

"She was so mild and gentle—the dear lamb," Mrs. Jackson said, in talking of her to old Mary Green; "so mild and gentle, that it made her think of the blessed angels when she looked at her; and, indeed, she could hardly do so without

crying, for she had hair so exactly like her poor dear lost Sally, who died of the small-pox when she was just about the same age. No, if she had ever such a bad heart, she could never find it in her to be cruel to Miss Maud."

Maud had been some time in England when her grandpapa took her to London to obtain the advice of Dr. Pirie, an eminent medical gentleman who had devoted much time and attention to the study of the eye and its various diseases. After a careful examination, he told Mr. Ashton that it was a case of great difficulty, though not entirely hopeless. The only chance of removing the cause of blindness was by a painful and dangerous operation. With proper care and skill, this might be followed by success, and she might be enabled to see, at all events, partially; but he was bound to say, that it would be attended with very great risk. Mr. Ashton sent an account of Dr. Pirie's opinion to her parents in India, and they were wishful that the operation should be tried at once, as nothing would be gained by delay. Maud would have given her consent to this also, but Mr. Ashton, fearing that it might not be successful, did not like that it 20

should take place while she was under his sole charge. So, as Mr. and Mrs. Summers were expecting to return to England in a year or two from that time, it was agreed that the operation should be postponed till they could be present to relieve their anxious relative of the responsibility. Their return had, however, from various causes, been delayed; and at the time when our story commences, Maud had been in England nearly three years, and it appeared likely that some considerable time would yet elapse before she could meet her parents again. She had no reason to repine, for she was surrounded by friends, who did all that they could to supply the place of her nearer relatives. Nevertheless, she often wished for their return, even though the thought of that trial in store for her always came into the pleasant prospect, and seemed like a dark cloud that dims the beauty of a summer sky.

The blind girl found a friend and companion of about her own age in the daughter of the vicar of Springfield. In a few months Ellen and Maud were united in one of those close friendships which girls of that age so frequently make. They were of very different dispositions, Maud being

of an even and equable temper-patient, firm, yet cheerful; while Ellen was generally full of life and fire, with a flow of spirits that made her sometimes almost like a wild creature; she was hasty, easily persuaded, and usually acted from the impulse of the moment. Perhaps they were all the fonder of each other for not being alike in these respects; for, in friendship, contrasts are often much better suited to each other than likenesses. I suppose they had their disagreements and their reconciliations, as every intimacy of the kind must have; for I am only describing human children, with faults and weaknesses like all the rest. But I do not speak of such things, for I wish to put down only the good and pleasant features. Their misunderstandings were not likely to be many in number, and I am sure they would not last long; for, as Ellen's brother Henry used to say sometimes, with a bow, and in such a funny way that you could hardly tell whether he meant it in jest or in earnest-

"You are like two flowers upon the same stem, young ladies; and, no doubt, if you were to be separated from each other, you would both pine away." Henry was two or three years older than Ellen; he had left home for a grammar-school in a town at some distance, and only came home for the vacations. And when he did come home, though good-tempered and kind, yet he was so very learned, and, by virtue of his age and wisdom, so superior to the two girls, that they looked up to him with something like awe. Like all the rest, though, he was fond of Maudie, and for her sake he would sometimes throw up his dignity for a time, and put up a swing for them under the large chesnut-tree in the orchard, or join in a good romping game at blind-man's-buff, in which Maudie's eyes did not need to be bandaged.

CHAPTER III.

MAUD'S EDUCATION.

"Though hard is the duty that may be required,
At once and with spirit obey;
With the hearty good will to do all that's desired,
You will quickly discover the way."—UNGLE WILLIAM.

ONE of the objects which Maud's parents had in view in sending her to England, was that she might be placed under some kind of instruction, and might be taught those few things in the way of accomplishments which a person deprived of sight is able to learn. The art of teaching the blind had not been so much attended to in those days as it has been since; it was thought by most persons that their infirmity quite shut them out from the usual branches of instruction which are imparted to others. Mr. Ashton, after making many inquiries, found two or three private establishments in which blind people were received in order to be educated; but when he came to examine into their system of management, there was in every case something which did not

please him. In nearly all these places, other pupils were taken who were not blind; in some of them, bodily punishment was occasionally made use of, and he did not like to expose poor little Maud to the risk of that. There were several large public institutions for the training of the blind, but the pursuits followed in these places were hardly suitable for one in his grand-child's station of life. Mr. Ashton therefore came to the conclusion that he would keep her at home with himself, and that he would devote himself to her instruction. It took him a long time to make up his mind to this course, for he had no very great idea of his own teaching powers.

"For an old man," he said, "who had been knocking about all over the world for thirty or forty years of his life, to settle down into a schoolmaster at the last, was a thing greatly to be wondered at. But he would do his best."

And those who knew Mr. Ashton's character,—so cheerful, pious, and persevering,—thought this the best arrangement. Maud was delighted when he told her of it, for the great burden upon her patient little heart for many a long day had

been the thought that she would have to leave her home and kind friends at Springfield just as she had got to know and love them, and to venture alone into the midst of strangers, and into a weary, dreary school. What she had to learn she could learn so much better here, where she had become familiar with everything; and, if grandpapa would only be her teacher, indeed she would try very hard to do and be everything that they could wish.

So the little blind girl was nearly ten years old when the process of her education commenced. And a difficult process it was to communicate to her the knowledge that is generally received at a much earlier age, and chiefly by means of the eye. Her grandfather wished to teach her reading, writing, arithmetic, and geography. In learning these, the use of the eyes is generally needful. One must see the shape of the letters or figures before one can learn to read or write them. One must understand the shape of the world, and the different shapes, sizes, and positions of the countries upon it, in order to know geography—and this must be done by means of sight. With learning

languages or history it is otherwise, as these may be acquired by hearing alone. So the first thing that Mr. Ashton had to do in his work of training was to teach his youthful pupil how to read. In what manner he did this, let me now explain.

He commenced, of course, by making her acquainted with the shape and sound of the letters of the alphabet. He had a long flat pincushion made, and covered over with silk tightly drawn, that it might be fine and smooth to the touch. Then, with a number of the largestheaded pins he could procure, he formed the letters one by one upon it. The heads of the pins stood up so plainly from the smooth silk, that it was easy for Maud to find out and distinguish between the shape of each letter by simply passing her fingers over them. Blind people, as is well known, from the constant use of their hands to feel out what they cannot see, are much more ready in perceiving things by the touch than those persons who have the use of their eyes; and so Maud soon got to know the alphabet perfectly, and was able to tell her tutor any letter, backwards or forwards, by a touch of her fingers. Then she had to learn to spell, to put the letters together, and find out their pronunciation; and though all this took a considerable time, and required much diligence and patience on her part and on that of Mr. Ashton, yet at last she had the satisfaction of overcoming all the difficulties, and the blind girl had learned to read.

At that time, very little had been done in this country towards printing books for the blind. A few passages of Scripture had been prepared in raised type, but it was in a different character to our alphabet-something like short-hand. Mr. Ashton preferred the common character, and so he followed his own plan with the pins and the long cushion. Every day, after dinner, before they took their usual afternoon ramble in the garden or over the farm, Maud used to accompany her kind teacher into the study (as they termed it), to prepare the lesson for the next morning. A short passage from Scripture or history, or some other subject, was pricked down in this way upon the cushion, which she would have to read for herself, and commit to memory for the next morning's lesson. This soon grew to be the source

of great pleasure to her, and it quickly became necessary to have the pincushion made much larger, to get space for longer lessons; and even then they were far too short to satisfy her eager mind.

When she was able, for the first time, to master a sentence, she wished to surprise her friend Ellen with a little display of her reading powers. Ellen knew that she was learning to read in this manner, but she had not told her of the progress she had made. So one afternoon, when Ellen came to fetch her over to the vicarage, Maud took her upstairs into the study on some pretence or other. Mr. Ashton had just finished the lesson for the next morning, and was coming out of the room when the girls were entering it.

"Oh, here is your pincushion!" said Ellen; "dear me, what a large one,—and do you think you will ever learn to read by it?"

"Well, I hope so, if grandpapa will be patient with me, and I have no fear that he will not be so. I suppose he has been printing something upon it, hasn't he?"

Then passing her hands over the lesson, she

read it, with only a little pause between each word. It was taken from the Bible:

"'What man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?'"

Ellen's astonishment was very great. She could not have believed it,—she had no idea that she would have learned so quickly, and scarcely thought she would have been able to learn at all. She made her go through it again, and watched her fingers closely, and then tried to do it herself, and failed,—a thing which delighted Maud still more. She felt proud of her success, and well she might, and Ellen shared her joy; and so in their doings and sayings on that pleasant afternoon, they were happier and merrier than ever.

The next step that Mr. Ashton took in his work of education was to teach his pupil to write. The letters which he had made use of in his reading-lessons were those which are

generally used for writing, being plainer and more easily formed than the usual square printing type. Having got the shape of these letters clearly fixed in her mind, she was now taught to make them herself. She had a frame, with a flat ruler which went from one side to the other, on which her hand rested to keep the line straight. There were little pegs at even distances down each side, and when she had written one line, she moved the ruler to the next peg below, and began another. A slate or a sheet of paper was fitted into the frame, and with this apparatus she was able, after a time, to write very well. At first, as we might expect, she made a great many blunders, leaving out words, and writing them one upon another; and sometimes forgetting to move the ruler, and so making sad work of the copy. But she did not make more blunders than most young beginners do, even with the use of their eyes, though her blunders were of a different sort to theirs. As she could not see when her pen required dipping, she generally wrote with a pencil, except when Mr. Ashton stood by, and dipped her pen for her. A happy day it was for Maud when she wrote her first

letter to her parents in India—a letter of her own composition, written in a firm and clear hand, and as clean and free from blots, young readers, as the very best letter you ever sent home to show your parents how you had improved in writing, and to announce the coming holidays.

Mand studied arithmetic in a somewhat similar way, making acquaintance with the figures by feeling their shape, and working the sums in her mind. She had a slate ruled into small squares, so that, by putting one figure in each square, she could keep the rows of figures perfectly even. She acquired the rudiments of geography, also, by means of her fingers. The outline of a country chosen for a lesson was printed on the pincushion, and the chief places in each marked by pins' heads. This came easy to her, and she associated each country in her mind with the shape of something that she was acquainted with; fancying Africa to be like an immense ham, and Italy like a long boot, kicking Sicily away from it; and so on with the others. French she learned to speak at first, without learning to read or write it. Mr. Ashton was a very good French scholar, and by hearing him she soon

acquired a sufficient knowledge of that language to enable her to converse in it. She wished, however, that after a time, when she had become tolerably perfect in her English studies, she might receive instruction in the same way in French reading and composition.

But of all her pursuits, the one which she loved the most was that of music. She seemed to have a natural taste and inclination for that. They did not attempt to give her any instruction in this accomplishment—she was left to follow the bent of her own inclination. She would sit, often for hours together, before the piano in the drawing-room,-sometimes playing music that she had learned by hearing others play it, and sometimes making up wild melodies of her own. It was enough for her to hear a piece of music two or three times over, and if it were very easy, once would often be sufficient; she had it then in her memory, and could go through it without a mistake. It was as great a delight to her kind grandpapa to listen to her performances, as it was to her to execute them; and it was a reward to him for all his trouble with the pins and the cushion, when in the evening she sang to him, in

her sweet and unaffected manner, some of those many pretty songs that she always kept in her mind. Even unmusical Mrs. Jackson used often to linger in the hall to listen, and somehow it always made Mrs. Jackson cry; for, as she was wont to say, it brought to her mind the blessed angels in heaven, and always made her think of her poor dear lost Sally.

And so Maud's education went on from day to day,—on a different plan to the usual mode of instruction, but answering, in her case, quite as useful a purpose, and showing that the mind may see, even though the body is blind.

CHAPTER IV.

MARY GREEN AND HER GHOST-STORY.

"Darker it grew, and darker fears
Came o'er her troubled mind;
When now,—a short quick step she hears,
Come patting close behind."—R. Bloomfield.

THERE was an old woman in Springfield, whose name was Mary Green, and at whose cottage Maud and Ellen used to be frequent visitors. She had once been a servant in a wealthy family which had occupied a mansion in the neighbourhood some years before, but all the members of which were now either dead or removed to a distance. Mary was the sole person in the place who kept their memory alive, and she talked as much about them as if they were still living near, in all their former wealth and display. This was very excusable in her, however, for she had been in their service from her youth to past middle age, and had been decently provided for by her old master before he died; as she would tell you, with many additions and digressions,

even if you were the greatest stranger in the world, before she had been ten minutes in conversation with you. It was a pretty little place that she lived in,—the walls whitewashed inside and out, and looking as clean and fresh as Mary's own cap, and the handkerchief that she tucked up so quaintly under her chin. There was a little garden in front, full of roses, and carnations, and double stocks, in which Mary took a great pride; for she had a hive of bees in one corner, and she cultivated these flowers with an eye to profit as well as to pleasure. She firmly believed that every bee in the hive knew her personally, and entertained feelings of respect for her, and would have been offended with you if you differed from her in this view. It is certain that with all the many swarms she had managed there, and all the honey she had taken, she had never received a single sting; and so, perhaps, the old lady might have been right after all.

In the honeysuckle arbour which stood at the side of the cottage, Maud and Ellen often sat with old Mary, and made her tell them stories of her youth. Mary wanted very little asking to do

this; in fact, she often began without asking; for, like most aged persons, her thoughts dwelt more readily upon times that had long been past, than upon things that were occurring in the present. When she talked of her youth, it seemed to her like recollecting the events of yesterday; while to her young listeners it was like hearing some old-fashioned piece of history—some tale of events which had happened ages ago. So differently does life always appear to those who have almost done with it, and to those who are just beginning. Very long to those who look forward—very short to those who look back.

Some of old Mary's narratives were very pleasant and entertaining, especially to those who knew that neighbourhood; for, having lived in it all her life, she had seen all the changes which had taken place there. She could remember when Taplow Moor was a moor indeed, though now it was the finest farm-land in the county. In her young days, the great park at Ninestones was nothing more nor less than a huge wood, where anybody might go to gather sticks and winter fuel. She had seen one or two of the immense stones from which it took its name, but they were

all gone now; the wood had become a trim park, and Ninestones Hall was the seat of a county baronet.

"There was no parson then in Springfield, Miss Ellen," she would say; "the church was only opened once a month, and the minister rode over from a place fifteen miles away, and galloped back after the service was over. And then we used to ramble in the woods on Sunday, and have a dance on the common if the evening were fine. Ah, those were the good old times, my dears! Not but what these are better, you know; in course they are, and it's much better to have a parson living here, and such a kind 'un, too, as your papa, Miss Ellen, to come every other while and see a poor body, and comfort her in her old age: oh, yes—but still they were bonnie days, and I will say that."

But Mary was rather given to believe in the marvellous—as such people generally are—and had a firm faith in witches, ghosts, and fairies. You could not have persuaded her to keep a black cat, if you had paid her liberally for it, because she thought that such creatures were the faithful friends and servants of witches.

How she could believe all these things, and yet live so comfortably and happily as she did all alone in that lonely cottage, I cannot imagine. Yet alone she did live,—except a large tortoise-shell cat and a tame starling, who were very good friends with each other and with her. I fancy I can see her now, sitting in the chimney-corner,—one favourite purring in her lap, the other perched upon her shoulder—and with her fingers busy at her knitting, though her eyes were shut as if she were asleep.

It was Mary who had first informed the girls of the use which the fairies were said to make of those large green rings which they had often observed among the grass in the meadows. They had been sometimes with Mary to gather mushrooms, and they found that the mushrooms grew more frequently there than anywhere else; and when they came upon a ring more full of them than usual, Mary used to say that there had been a grand meeting of the fairies there the night before,—a sort of evening party on a large scale,—and that these mushrooms had been brought there as seats for the tiny people. And when they picked up a little oblong stone, with

small raised dots upon it (a kind of fossil which was very common there), she told them not to keep it, for it was a fairy loaf; they had dropped it in their journey, and they would be sure to come and fetch it. Ellen used to laugh, and say that they must have good teeth for such little folks, if they were able to eat such hard bread as that. Ellen always laughed at these tales which Mary told them; she did not believe that they were true, though she was fond of hearing her relate them. And when Ellen laughed, Maud laughed too, though she did not think so lightly of them as her companion. Her disposition was naturally much more timid than Ellen's, and her blindness made her lonely, and so more given to thought, and more likely to brood over such tales.

I must relate one of Mary's stories, just to show what very slender grounds such things are often built upon, and also because this very story was the source of some distress to poor Maud. I will put it down exactly in Mary's words, which will give it much greater effect. It was sunset on a summer's evening, and a very pretty sunset it was. They were all sitting

in amongst the honeysuckles in the arbour I have spoken of; and old Mary was even more than usually disposed to give free liberty to that much-indulged member—her tongue. She was reckoning up, as usual, the things and people of her younger days, when gentlemen wore lace ruffles and powdered wigs, and when, as she told them for the hundredth time, "Taplow Moor was a moor, though now it's the finest farm-land in the county."

"And there used to be real robbers and highwaymen upon it too, my dears; and people used often to ride into Springfield after dark, who had been stopped on the way there and been robbed. Several times my dear old master, the squire, was served like this, and all that was worth anything, even to his silver spurs, was taken away from him. But the robbers were always gentlemen, he said, and always made handsome excuses; and once they gave him back a shillin' to pay the turnpike gate. There was one man by the name of Simpkins, who was kind of first man among 'em, and well known all over. They tried to get him a long while, and he had a vast of narrow escapes, but they got him at



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MARY GREEN TELLING HER GHOST STORY.



last; and then they put up a gibbet at the corner of the road, just beyond where Farmer Yates's barn stands now, and they hung him up there in chains. It was a very fearsome sight, I can tell you, for folks that went by, to see the body of a man swingin' to and fro, and all black with the time and weather. And whenever I went across the moor, which I did sometimes to my sister's at Notbury, I used to shut my eyes when I went past, and I always took care to come back by daylight; for people did say, you know, how that Simpkins's ghost used to ride about over the moor just as he did when he was. alive. But once I was dreadfully frightened, which it was about Christmas time, I havin' been over to Notbury; and the days bein' very short, it grew on to be dark before I well noticed it. I set off home directly, and John, which was my sister's husband, came with me to see me safe across the moor. But as we were comin' through the village, who but Mr. Noble should we meet;-and he took John off to see after some sheep that had broken the hurdles, and got away out of the folds, being that John was Mr. Noble's shepherd. So I had to go on alone, and

dreadfully frightened I was too, my dears, as you may think; and frightened you would have been, I'm sure, if you had been in my shoes. To make it worse, a thick storm of snow came on just when I had got fair on to the moor, so that I got half-blinded with it, and couldn't by no means see my way. Hows'ever, I managed to go on, with the snow drivin' in my face, and the wind blowin' hard against me, till somehow or other I felt that I was comin' close to the gibbet. I didn't dare to look-I couldn't raise my eyes to it for the worth of anything; I couldn't bear to see it even in the daytime, and it would ha' been as good as death to me if I had seen it then. I tried to hurry past it as quick as I could. But it seemed as if I couldn't get byas if I was forced to stand still, and listen; and just then the wind dropped all of a sudden, and I heard a noise that seemed like-"

Here something came crashing through the leaves at the side of the arbour. Ellen and Maud screamed out at this sudden interruption. But it was only old Mary's tortoiseshell cat which had jumped into her lap, and curling himself snugly round, went to sleep directly.

"I heard a noise," Mary continued, "that seemed like the creakin' of an old door when the hinges have got very rusty, and I knew that was the irons a-swingin' to and fro in the wind. I started off again, and made all the more haste, though I heard it again and again, and at last I was sure that I heard somethin' else just like short footsteps behind me. Oh, dear! I thought I was lost; I was afraid every moment that somethin' very shockin' was goin' to happen to me. I kept on, hows'ever, as fast as I could lay foot to the ground, till I got in sight of the park lodgethen I stumbled over a stone, and fell flat down on my face, and just as I went down, the footsteps went clatterin' past, close to my ear it seemed, and then they dashed through the hedge, and into the little paddock on the other side. I screamed out, and the people from the lodge came out and found me lyin' there in the snow. They put me to bed there, and sent word up to the house that I was too frightened and ill to come home that night. And there John found me the next morning when he came over, for he did come over about the sheep; he followed the tracks right across the moor, and actually found one of 'em in the little paddock, where the ghost, or whatever it was, seemed to vanish away. You may be sure, my dears, that I never went across the moor again after sundown—no, not even with company. Indeed, I don't think I should like to go now, even though the gibbet has gone years ago, and Farmer Yates's house stands close by,—I should be sure to think of that dreadful night."

"But you don't really think that it was the highwayman's ghost that followed you, do you?" asked Ellen.

"It's not for the like of me to say what it was, my dear," answered Mary Green; "I don't pretend to pry into things that are secret. I haven't got book-larnin' as some people have, and it wouldn't be right for me to speculate upon such dark matters. I never see the thing, mind that; and not seein' it, in course I can't say what it was like; but it was somethin' fearsome, I could tell that by my feelin's."

"Well, Mary," said Ellen again, "I should think, after all, it was the sheep that followed you across the moor."

"The sheep! No, indeed, Miss Ellen; that's

just what John said, and the servants at the hall. As if I shouldn't ha' known the tread of a sheep better than that."

"But it had lost its way, Mary, and perhaps thought that by following you it might get safe home again. Then it was found in the paddock, you know, just where you observed that the footsteps ceased. Oh, it must have been the sheep."

This explanation of the matter did not suit Mary at all, and she seemed rather hurt with Ellen for mentioning it. It could never have been that, indeed. To think that all the horror should be thus taken out of her adventure, and that dreadful secret explained away into such a very common-place occurrence. But young people didn't know anything about such matters -how should they? And when she thought of this, she made friends again with Ellen, for she was too fond of her to be long otherwise; and, besides, Mary was not one of those who like to brood over a little wound in the feelings till it gets to be a grievous sore. And Ellen very sensibly held her tongue upon the subject, for she saw that it was one of Mary's weak points, and

that she would only grieve her without convincing her, if she tried to show her that she was wrong. And so the beautiful sunset passed away, and the starling gave his farewell chatter before he went to his warm roost over the oven, and old Mary gathered up her apron with her cat in it, and came in; and Maud and Ellen set off briskly home, the latter in high glee at Mary's amusing narrative of her adventure.

"Think of her making a ghost out of a poor little stray sheep, Maudie; and think of her believing it to this day. How amused papa and mamma will be when I tell them; and Henry,

"I want to be a second to the second to the

what fun it will be for him!"

CHAPTER V.

MAUD'S ADVENTURE.

"Poor child, I would not have thee left to thy terrors.
Did a sudden noise affright thee? Lo, this or that hath caused it:
Things undefined are full of dread, and stagger stouter nerves."
M. F. TUPPER

For Henry Ansted was at home just at this time for the summer holidays. He had won several prizes at the last examination, and was beginning to anticipate the struggles and distinctions of the university. Maud thought, when she heard of his honours, that he would be much grander and more learned than ever in his behaviour to her. She was mistaken in her expectation. He was so astonished and pleased at the acquirements she had made since their last meeting, that he took more notice of her than he had ever done before, and seemed disposed to treat her as something like an equal. Maud took him into her study, and displayed before him all the plans and preparations which Mr. Ashton had devised for her instruction,-showed him

the literary pincushion, worked a hard sum in practice which he dictated, wrote an exercise for his inspection, and altogether so pleased him, that he shook hands with her, and praised her diligence in very warm language. And this from Henry, who was nearly fifteen years old, and wise, as she thought, beyond his years; who had carried off the best prizes in the school examination, and was actually going to Cambridge in a year or two,—it quite flattered modest little Maud, and made her very thankful to him for his kind expressions.

Those silly stories of Mary Green had a bad effect, however, upon her peace of mind. Blind people often think a great deal more about such things than those who have the use of their eyes. Providence has given us the blessing of sight, in order that we may perceive and avoid any dangers that may approach us; and as long as we can see that we are not in danger, we do not feel any fear. But if our sight is taken from us, or if we are prevented from using it, we may perhaps fall unknowingly into peril,—we cannot tell what evils threaten us,—we may, perhaps, fear without having any just cause. Thus, in

the dark night, we often tremble and feel frightened, and we cannot tell why; we fancy that there may be danger around us, and we are not able to see that there is none. But the blind are always in the dark,—it is for ever night with them; and children who suffer under this affliction are much more likely to be timid and easily frightened than those who can open their eyes wide and look round them, and see that all is safe. So we must not blame Maud if she thought more than Ellen did of Mary Green's ghost and fairy tales, and if she often trembled when she lay awake in the still and lonely night, and when they would come into her mind.

Maud could find her way very well by herself from Mr. Ashton's to the vicarage; and she often made the journey, with Bustle for her protector, when her grandpapa was busy or not at home. Indeed, the distance was not very great, and the road lay through the fields at the back of the village; but she met with an adventure which alarmed her very much on one of these little journeys—it happened on an evening a week or two after the gossip with old Mary, which we noticed in the last chapter. She had been sitting

with Ellen and Mrs. Ansted, and talking over various little matters, till Bustle got quite tired and impatient, and scratched with his feet to come away. Henry had gone to the market town on Mr. Ansted's old pony, and he was to bring them some new songs, which Maud was to come over in the morning and hear; so she started on her walk home, thinking how quiet and peaceful the evening was; and wondering how the sun looked when he was setting. Bustle was busy far before, hunting something, or pretending to do so, among the grass, with a great deal of galloping and barking. Maud came to a narrow wicket and entered a path which lay, for a short distance, between two hedges, and she knew that this was about half-way home. Just then she became aware of a panting noise close behind her, and immediately after she felt two great heavy feet placed upon her shoulders, and something knocked her bonnet off behind. Of course, she thought at once of Mary Green's story, and stood still for a moment, quite motionless with fear, and then uttering a loud scream. she shook off those dreadful feet and started to run at the top of her speed, not knowing or

thinking of what direction she was taking. She heard somebody burst out laughing, a long way behind her, and cry out, "Seize her! seize her!" and then a deep muffled bark close upon her heels, as it seemed to her, and this made her run all the faster. Then she heard the sharp and angry cry of little Bustle, and just as he came dashing past her to rush upon the enemy, her feet slid up, and she fell fainting to the ground.

Maud remembered nothing more until she woke up from a trance, as it appeared, and found herself snug and comfortable in her own little bed at home, with her kind grandpapa standing beside her, and Mrs. Jackson moving softly about in the room. For some time she could not imagine what had happened, and only knew that she felt very faint and weak, as if she had been ill. She made an attempt to raise her arm, but it seemed stiff and heavy, and there was a bandage tied tightly round it, for the doctor had been there, and she had just been bled. By degrees, it all came back to her recollection-her terror-her headlong flight-that fearful consciousness of something following her, and gaining upon her at every step. She was going to say something, but Mr. Ashton, touching her lips with his finger, warned her to be silent, and the good housekeeper presently after whispered in her ear,—

"Try to sleep, my dear Miss Maud; you have been very much frightened, and made very ill, poor thing; but to-morrow you will be better, please God—and then you shall know all about it."

So shortly after she fell into a nice quiet slumber, and when she woke next day it was late in the afternoon. She was much better, but the effects of that violent fright remained with her for a long time after.

She then learned the circumstances of the occurrence which had proved so dangerous to her. A youth, the son of a butcher in a neighbouring village, was walking through the fields at the same time as Maud, having with him a dog of a kind particularly large and fierce, but which, for fear of accident, had been tightly muzzled. The lad was sitting on a gate in one of the meadows which Maud crossed, and did not attempt to check the animal when he set off in pursuit of her. Being of a thoughtless and

cruel disposition, it was good fun for him when the dog suddenly leaped upon her shoulders, and to see her start off in terror with the fierce animal close at her heels. He knew that he could not bite her, and so he urged him on, and ran behind to witness the chase. He declared afterwards that he did not know that Mand was blind; and perhaps, being a stranger in the village, this might have been true. But this was no excuse for his cruel conduct; and, indeed, nothing can justify one human being in seeking a selfish gratification for himself by wilfully inflicting pain upon another. But just as Maud fell down fainting, and the huge dog went tumbling over her, Henry came up on the pony, galloping at the top of his speed; for he had seen from the road what was happening, and hastened off to Maud's assistance. Bustle, like a brave little fellow as he was, had seized the butcher's dog, which was four times his size, by his throat, and held tight on to him, though the other threw him up and down, and rolled him over and over to shake him off. He could not bite, so Bustle had it all his own way, and he made the fierce brute feel the sharpness of

his little teeth pretty keenly. Henry lifted up poor inanimate Maudie, held her before him on the pony as carefully as if she had been a baby, and thus carried her safely home. Having seen her duly placed under the care of Mrs. Jackson, who was dreadfully alarmed, Henry went back, with his heart full of honest indignation, to find the ruffian boy who was the cause of all this trouble. He soon saw the dog coming slinking sullenly along, with his neck covered with the tokens of Bustle's valour. His master was at no great distance behind him. Henry did not spend much time in conversation, but applied the riding-whip which he carried with great vigour to his shoulders; and when the other turned upon him with closed fists, Henry threw it away, and gave him in his own fashion the sound thrashing which he so richly deserved. Having learned a little about such things at a public school, Henry, though the smaller of the two, was far more than a match for his opponent, and came off without a scratch. Rather an undignified thing, you will think, perhaps, for the wise and stately Henry to engage in, brawling and fighting with a brutal

butcher's boy. But Henry's stateliness covered a kindly heart, which felt very keenly an injury inflicted either on himself or others; he had justice on his side in this case, and thought nothing of his dignity for the time. He would have done the same if Maud had been a stranger; but she was his sister's friend, and a growing favourite with himself, and blind into the bargain; and all this made him the more prompt to chastise the cruel author of this wrong. Mr. Ansted, as we may suppose, was not an advocate for fisticuffs, but he could not help approving his son's conduct; and Ellen, when she heard of it, kissed her "noble brother," as she called him, for his bravery. A day or two after, the lad's father brought him over to apologize, fearing that Mr. Ashton might take legal proceedings against him. The youth seemed really sorry when he saw poor Maud, to think that he should have acted so inhumanly to a poor sightless girl. He asked her forgiveness in a very humble way, and she readily gave it; but Mr. Ashton made it a condition that the dog should be destroyed.

Maud acknowledged that her terror on this occasion was greatly increased by her remem-

brance of that silly story of Mary Green's adventure on the common. So Mary received a caution on the subject; and Mr. Ashton reasoned with Maud, to show her how needless and unwise such apprehensions are.

"We have plenty of troubles to distress us, that are open to observation," he said, "without trying to make others for ourselves out of our own fancy. We know nothing at all about spirits, and we have no cause to be afraid of them. And as for all the tales about witches and fairies, they are too great nonsense to cause any sensible mind a moment's uneasiness. The dangers that we have to dread and guard against come to us either from our own hearts within, or from the world of men without - dangers which are immediate and visible to the mind. To that man or child whose heart is right, and who lives in innocence and honesty, the night is as clear as the day, and he has no reason to fear anything."

CHAPTER VI.

THE GIPSY-PARTY AT THE KITCOTE.

"Away—away from men and towns,
To the wild-wood and the downs."—Shelley.

"I have a plan in my head," said Henry, one day during his holiday,—" a plan for a very pleasant excursion. Suppose, Ellen, that you and Maud and I take a trip over to the old Kitcote on Marsland Hill, and spend the day there; camping on the ground, you know, after the gipsy fashion. We can take the pony and cart, and carry our provisions with us, and we can light a fire, and sling a kettle on three sticks and boil the water for our tea; and we'll just see for a day how we should like the life of a roving gipsy."

"That will be delightful; when shall it be?"

said both the girls at once.

"Yes," added Ellen, "and it will be a capital opportunity for you to do something that I have wanted from you for a long time. I have been

trying to make a pair of hand-screens for a present to mamma, and I should like you to sketch Kitcote, if you please. It will match very nicely with that sketch of Ninestones Hall which you did last summer, and I mean to put that on the other one.

"Well, I'll agree, ladies," said Henry; "that is, if you will promise to sit by me all the time, Ellen, and take a lesson in sketching and the use of colours; for I don't think you have made much advance in that way during this half."

Henry was clever in water-colour drawings, and had even begun to do a little in oil. Taking much delight in it himself, he was anxious that Ellen should be fond of this accomplishment also. But though she had considerable taste for it, yet she wanted industry and application, and therefore her progress had been very slow. She was glad, however, now to join a day's amusement and a day's instruction so pleasantly together. With their parents' consent, then, they fixed their excursion for the first fine day.

Kitcote was an old cromlech which stood on the side of a vast hill, about six miles from Springfield. It consisted of four immense flat

stones—two standing upright, with a third crosswise between them, and a fourth, the largest of all, laid on the top for a roof. There was a number of very old yew trees behind it, so thickly planted as almost to make a forest of yew. Down in the hollow, a mile away, there was a heap of large stones of the same kind, which were all lying confusedly together now, but which at some time or other had most likely formed several cromlechs of the same form as the one on the hill. Marsland was the highest of the hills in the neighbourhood; and from it, through a valley which stretched along between two ridges, one could perceive the sea on a clear day, and steamers and sailing ships so far off that they seemed to be slowly moving in the clouds instead of in the water. It was a beautiful spot, though certainly the many yew-trees scattered about gave it, even on the finest day, something of a churchvard appearance.

And it was one of the very finest days of that season when the three young people started off, soon after breakfast, on their pleasant trip. They were in capital spirits; Ellen almost boisterous. Bustle rolled over and over in the dust till he got his shaggy coat full of it, and then amused himself by jumping up at old Adam's nose (that was the name of the pony), who acknowledged his playfulness with a friendly snort, and then trotted on more merrily than ever.

"Is it going to rain, think you?"

"Oh, no, not a cloud to be seen."

"If it does, we have brought umbrellas."

"Are you sure that we have not forgotten anything?"

"Whereabouts is the kettle?"

This was the kind of question and answer which occupied them for some time; and by the time they had got comfortably settled, and decently sobered down, they were half-way on the road to Marsland. Then it began to grow very hot, and Ellen took the largest of the umbrellas and put it up as a screen, and felt sorely tempted to try the quality of a basket of strawberries which they had with them; but the others advised the postponement of this till their need was more urgent, and till they had got to their destination.

"We are out on business as well as pleasure, remember," said the sage Henry; "let us do something to earn our refreshments before we make use of them. A little work, you know, will give them double sweetness. Get on, Adam; come—come—oh, you want to drink a little, do you?"

And Adam drew up at a small pool where he had often been before, and having drunk his fill, started off at increased speed with his merry burden.

Arrived at their destination, Henry selected a suitable point of view, from which the old Kitcote appeared in good relief, thrown out by a dark background of yews. Adam was loosed from his bondage, and left to browse on the short grass at his pleasure, and the party sat down to their work in as shady a spot as they could find.

While Henry was drawing his outline, and preparing his colours, he asked Ellen if she knew anything about the history and purpose of

the object before them.

"I looked over the county history in papa's library last night," said he, "on purpose to see what I could find respecting it; for I thought you and Maud might be pleased to know, if you did not already. It is a very pleasant way of gaining knowledge, when we can blend it with

amusement—far better than plodding wearily over a book to learn something which does not interest us—when we can see the thing first, and so get an interest in it, and then learn what is known respecting its object and uses."

Maud had wandered away from them as far as the stones themselves, and was now going round them, feeling them with her hands, and tapping them with the walking-stick she usually carried. She could not reach to the top, but she was trying to find out the size and shape of the famous Kitcote.

"Maudie," cried Ellen, "come here. Henry is going to tell us something about the stones."

"I am only going to tell you what I read myself in a history yesterday, Maud," said Henry; "so don't give me too much credit for wisdom. It seems there are no stones of this kind to be found anywhere about here, so that these must have been brought from a long distance. Just think what work it must have been, to drag these great stones, weighing six or seven tons each, up this steep hill."

"But what were they brought up here for?" said Mand.

"Ah, that nobody seems to know. Many people suppose that they formed part of a druidical temple in former times, and that they are of the same kind as the remains at Stonehenge and other parts of the country. Then it appears that a great battle was fought here in the early days of Britain, in which several powerful chiefs were slain; and some persons suppose these stones to be a sort of monument erected over the tombs of those chiefs."

"I see it's like most other things of the kind," said Ellen; "nobody seems to know much about it,—it's all supposition. Why don't they dig down, and see if they can find the tomb? Perhaps there might be a deal of money or precious stones buried with them."

"That is not at all likely, Ellen. If there were a tomb, it would probably only contain a few spear-heads and hatchets, and a shield or two, with the bones of the dead warriors closed up in a large jar. And besides, they could not search for the tomb without pulling down these stones, which have stood in this position for so many ages."

"Well, that would be a pity," answered Ellen;

"but I think the story which the peasant people about here tell of these stones is much more wonderful, though certainly it's not so likely to be true. They say, you know, that an old witch carried them up here, one under each arm, one on her back, and one on her head; and where she brought them from nobody knows."

"That cannot be true," said Maud, who had got over her superstitious feelings entirely; "for, in the first place, we all know that there are no such things as witches in the world, and if there were, I should like to ask how she could have carried a stone on her back, when she had one on her head already, and no hands to spare to hold it with."

They all laughed at this, and Ellen replied—
"Well, that is what they say, and I'll be bound, if we were to ask that boy down yonder in the hollow with the sheep, he would tell us so. And there's a hole in the roof stone, too, which they say is always filled with water, even in the hottest weather; and if you clean it out ever so dry, in a minute it will be filled again. And those stones down in the valley there,—there is

a story about them too, that if you count them over ever so carefully, you can never make the same number come twice."

"What a one you are for wonderful stories, Ellen, and what a capital memory you have for them!"

"Of course I don't believe them, Henry. I

only repeat what these people say."

"The best plan is to try it for ourselves," said Henry; "and if we are not too tired by-and-bye we will make trial of these wonders, and see whether they are magic stones, or only ordinary ones after all. Put a little more blue in the tint for these yew trees, Ellen,—we must throw them into deeper shadow. See what a pretty effect that ray of sunlight between the branches gives to the upper stone,—it quite alters the tint,—I must make it a little warmer."

"And now, you might as well be talking Chinese for me," said Maud, "for I cannot understand anything of what you mean when you speak of tinting, and sunbeams, and shadows."

"No, Maud, there are many things that we do and know, which your blindness does not quite shut you out from; but those are things you can never know,—unless, please God, you should

get your sight."

"It is the greatest puzzle to me," she returned, "and I have often asked grandpapa to tell me what colour is, but I never could make anything of his answers. I hear you talk of red, and green, and blue, and white, and I cannot imagine to myself what it can mean. Only yesterday morning Mrs. Jackson said to me, 'Miss Maud, why do you wear that light pink neckerchief? it doesn't suit your complexion at all.' 'Doesn't suit me!' I asked; 'and why not?' 'Oh, the colour doesn't match your cheeks.' 'I can't understand you,' I said; 'it's as warm as the others, and feels as fine in quality as they, and I can't think why it should not look as well.' 'Oh, that's just because you can't see the colour,' she said. I suppose it's impossible for a blind person to know what colour is. Well, I can just tell when it is mid-day, and when it is midnight; that is all. At present, that is; perhaps by-andbye I may be able to do more."

"I sincerely hope you may," said both Ellen and Henry.

"There are some other things," added the latter, "in which nothing can ever make up for the want of sight. For instance, you could never understand the rules of drawing and perspective——"

Here some little trouble was occasioned by the unruly conduct of Bustle. He had been for some time snugly nestled in Maud's lap, and had enjoyed a good nap after his dusty ramble. But now, waking up all of a sudden from his slumber, he made a great dash, which upset the waterglass; then putting both his fore-feet upon the wet palette, removed them immediately to Ellen's light dress, on which he left their exact prints in burnt umber and dark green. Then darting off in full career, he returned to hover round and round Henry, as if prepared to give a few bold finishing strokes to the picture. Everything failing to pacify him, Henry was obliged to get up and tie him to the pony-cart, and as the pony had strayed beyond bounds, he was fetched back and submitted to the same process; and then Henry, finding that the colours had in the meantime got dry, thought that they had better take lunch before they did any more, -a proposal which proved highly acceptable to the rest of the party.

While they were sitting at their rustic meal, a light haze, which had hung all the morning over the top of the hill, suddenly passed away, and they had a full view of the whole course of the long valley below them and before them, and the sea at the end, looking faintly blue in the far distance.

"Oh, the sea—the sea!" cried Ellen, who was the first to perceive it.

"Yes, there it is," said Henry; "and how grand and beautiful it appears,—even such a little of it, and at this long way off. There are ships in sight, too; several of them, you see. I wish I could just bring that into my sketch; but I cannot—it would be out of character."

When Henry resumed his painting, Maud reminded him of what he was saying when Bustle occasioned the interruption, and wished to know what other things there were in which a blind person could have no share.

"Oh, for instance," replied Henry, "the perception of size. I noticed you just now, when

you wanted to know how large those stones were, you went and felt them; but you could not reach to the top, and so you could not form a just idea of their magnitude. Well, then, there is this hill, Marsland—mountain, we might almost call it—it is a great deal larger than any of the other hills around. I can see the difference at once, having the use of my eyes; but you, Maudie, would have to feel them both all over before you could judge—which would be, of course, a thing impossible."

Maud laughed very heartily at the idea of her groping all over the sides of two hills to feel the difference in their size.

"Well, and what beside, Henry?"

"What beside?—why, the perception of distance also. There are two trees down there in the valley—one does not cover the other at all, and yet I can perceive at once that the one is much further off than the other. You might find out their existence by the touch, but it would not give you the perception of distance—you would have to go close to them. There are those ships out there on the sea; you know that a ship is a great deal larger than Springfield Church, and

yet they are lessened to our view till they look as small as tiny boats, and some of them even like little specks on the waves. So you see, Maud, we may make our hands to supply some of the most ordinary uses of the eye—as you have done, in learning to read and write by means of them; but there are finer powers belonging to it, and if the sight is lost, no other sense can make up for them."

In due time the sketch was finished, and pronounced by Ellen to be perfectly correct and satisfactory. Henry then proceeded to mount the old stones for the purpose of ascertaining the truth respecting the hole which was said to exist there. Certainly there was a hole, and as certainly it was full of water. He got a cup and tried to empty it, but it ran in as fast as he ladled it out. He then got a stick, and pushed it a long way in, and found that there was a large chamber within, from which the water came to fill the outer hole. There was also a narrow fissure on the top of the stone, through which, when it rained, the water ran into the chamber beneath; and thus a store was collected there, which, not being exposed to the sun,

would perhaps last through the whole summer. So this mystery was explained, and Henry took great pains in making it clear to his companions. Like most things of the sort, it was nothing so very extraordinary after all.

"Now we'll shift our camp," said Henry, "and descend from the mountain into the valley. It is now four o'clock; we will rest, and get our tea beside the other stones in the hollow."

So Bustle was released from his imprisonment, and they made a slow but safe journey down the long hill. Henry brought out the cross sticks which he had provided, made the fire, filled the kettle with water from a spring near, and they sat down, like gipsies, to watch the process of boiling. A few sticks more were necessary, which they collected with some trouble, for there was not much wood near; and then, the water having duly boiled, Ellen made tea. It was milkless, and the smoke had given the water rather a strong taste; but Ellen asserted, and the others did not deny, that a better cup of tea was never made. At all events, they enjoyed it extremely, and this being the case, a few awkward circumstances were not to be noticed.

"Now for the other mystery," said Henry; "let us try to count the stones. Ellen, do your best; and Maudie, try what you can do also."

The stones were close by, all tumbled one upon the other, some nearly covered with moss and lichens; and it seemed, indeed, rather a difficult task to accomplish. Maud made the trial, but soon pricked her fingers with a bramble, and gave it up in despair. Ellen went all round carefully, and thought she had taken note of every stone.

"There are twenty-six," said she.

"Now try again, Ellen."

Ellen did so, and, to her vexation, made the number only twenty-four.

"Give it one more trial," said Henry.

"How very tiresome,—this time there are twenty-seven!"

"Now it's my turn."

And Henry took a piece of chalk, and wrote a number upon every stone, till he had left none unmarked. From this it appeared that Ellen was right at first, the true number being twentysix. But they were so mixed together, and

overgrown, that it was very perplexing to count them without marking.

"A little examination into such things soon puts the mystery to flight, doesn't it?" said Henry. "Some people like the mystery best, however, and for them 'seeing is not believing.' And now, girls, let us pack up, and get away home."

CHAPTER VII.

A BIRTHDAY.

"Where sucks the bee now? Summer is flying;
Leaves round the beech-tree faded are lying;
Violets are gone from their grassy dell,
With the cowslip cups, where the fairies dwell;
The rose from the garden hath pass'd away;
Yet happy, fair girl, is thy natal day."—MRS. HEMANS.

It was a fine clear morning late in the autumn, when the leaves were falling rapidly, and every breath of wind was followed by a plentiful shower of them; when all the flowers were gone from Mr. Ashton's garden, except the chrysanthema and the Michaelmas daisies; when the nuts and blackberries had all disappeared, and there was nothing in the fields but stubble. There were one or two persons in Mr. Ashton's house, however, who were glad that the day was fine, for it was one which they honoured with more notice than usual; it was Maud's birthday—the thirteenth anniversary of that occasion. Maud was standing at the hall-door, waiting for Mr. Ashton's return from his walk before break-

fast; for he always tried to get a breath of fresh air, and to see which way the wind was, before he sat down to his morning meal. As soon as she heard his step in the shrubbery walk, she hastened to him to receive his greetings.

"Good morning, Maudie dear; many happy returns of the day to you," as he kissed her forehead. "I'm glad to see such a fine morning for

your birthday."

"Thank you, thank you, grandpapa; you've got some flowers there, have you not?" said she, as she took his hand.

"Yes; I've been robbing the greenhouse a little," producing a handful of beautiful flowers which he had been carrying under his left arm. "You know we couldn't do without flowers upon the table on this day, could we?"

"You are always so kind, grandpapa," said

Maud, coughing.

"Why, you have nothing on your head, child; let us make haste in, pray: this chill October wind will give you cold."

Mrs. Jackson met them in the hall, and mingled her good wishes with an affectionate scolding on

the same account.

"To think that you should go out o' doors without anything to cover your head and shoulders, when here's your hat and shawl close beside you here, and your garden bonnet hanging yonder; and, indeed, you had better ha' put on the master's own coat there, than to ha' gone out like that, and you with such a cough, too."

"Well, Mrs. Jackson, I don't think I shall take

any harm."

"Indeed, and I hope you wont, on your own birthday, too; and I wish you many returns of

it, and happy ones, Miss Maud."

Maud went in to breakfast, with her heart palpitating with pleasure and curiosity. She knew very well what had happened before on her birthday; every one in the house, from the kitchen-maid to Mr. Ashton, had made her some little present, and she had found them duly arranged on the breakfast-table when she came down in the morning. She was sure that they had been planning something of the kind this time, for she had caught a few whispers in the kitchen which had not been intended for her ear. Maud was very susceptible of kindness from any one, and so her breath came rather faster as she

entered the dining-room. And I defy any one who duly appreciates the affection of others, to enter a room where they believe that their friends have been preparing a pleasant surprise for them, without sharing her half-curious, half-joyful feeling.

Sure enough, as soon as she was seated, the servant placed a tray before her, on which the various presents were arranged. There was, first of all, an enormous cake, which she immediately set down to the account of Mrs. Jackson; then a pair of warm worsted gloves, neatly knitted by the housemaid. Poor Jenny, the little kitchen-maid, had contributed some cuffs, almost her first attempt at knitting; but Maud would have worn them had they been ten times as rough. The gardener had sent a beautiful orange-tree, which he had taken great pains with, and which was just breaking out into flower. Maud seemed especially gratified with this, as she passed her hands over the smooth leaves, for she knew what pride he had taken in it. There was a book from Mr. Ansted, and a new song from Mrs. Ansted, and a neck-ribbon from Ellen, accompanied by a note, stating that she was to be

the interpreter of her parents' presents. There was a letter also which had come by post, dated from Sandborough Grammar-school, and containing Henry's congratulations and good wishes, which Mr. Ashton read to her. Altogether Maud was so overcome with pleasure and excitement, that she found herself unable to eat any breakfast; but, being reminded that of all days in the year that was not the one to go fasting, she was fain to compel herself to take something. While they were at their meal, there was an old lady in a red cloak came shuffling up the gravel-walk, kindness and importance being visible in her look.

"Why, here's old Mary Green," said Mr. Ashton, as she passed the window. "What can she want at this time of the morning?"

"Please sir, here's Mary Green," said the servant, entering; "and she's come to wish Miss Maud many happy returns; and she said I was to ask if she would be so good as to take a little jar of her new honey for a bit of a present."

Maud couldn't help shedding a few tears over this,—she had been keeping them back for some time, but they would come now. Poor old Mary had been blamed—as Maud thought, unjustly—about the ghost story, and Mrs. Jackson had given her what she called "a good rating" about it. Maud had done all she could since to make it up to her, telling her that, as it turned out, it had done her good rather than harm; for it had been a wholesome lesson to her, and had cured her of her silly fears. And this little jar of honey gave Maud more pleasure than any of the other presents, because it proved that Mary's feelings, which were wounded at the time, were now as affectionate and friendly as ever towards her. Indeed, though she was ignorant and superstitious, and in many things peculiar, yet Mary Green was a good woman in the best sense of the term; always ready to do a kind action, and one who would not willingly inflict injury on another.

There was one thing which my readers might think curious;—among all these tokens of goodwill, there was nothing from Mr. Ashton. Maud did not think anything of this, for it was only a week before that he had made her a very handsome present, which she had regarded then as a birthday gift. Her mother had enclosed in her last letter a small lock of hair, almost white,—the first which had been cut from the head of

that little brother Arthur who had been born after she had left India. Mr. Ashton had sent to London, and had this, together with some of her parents' and his own hair, set in a pretty gold locket, which he had presented to Maud. So she came down to breakfast this morning with this locket on her neck, considering it as her grandpapa's tribute of affection on this day.

"Now, Maudie," Mr. Ashton said, after prayers, "what are we to do to-day? Are we to consider it altogether as a holiday, or shall we have our usual lessons this morning? Take your choice

entirely, my dear."

"We must not leave out the lessons altogether, grandpapa; it would hardly be a pleasant day without them. I shall not know how to spend the time this morning, if we do not go into the study. In the afternoon, you know, Ellen is coming early, and we are to take a walk before tea."

"Very well, my dear; go upstairs, then, and I'll come presently. You can go on with the exercise which I have marked on the cushion."

Maud tripped upstairs with a light heart, singing as she went, for she felt very happy. The study window was open, and remembering Mrs. Jackson's injunctions respecting colds and draughts, she shut it carefully; and the sun shining in there warmly and pleasantly, she sat down on the window-seat for a moment before she began her work.

"How very thankful I ought to be," she said, talking in a low voice to herself, as she frequently did;—"so many kind friends about me, all trying to please me, and doing all they can to make me love them. Who could help loving them, I wonder? I'm sure I love them all. What nice presents!"—and her fingers played with the locket,—"and yet it's not so much the presents as the kind feeling which made them think about me, and about this day. Poor old Mary! I shall like her better than ever after this, I'm sure."

She took her slate from its place, and came to the table to find out what lesson had been set for her. When she put her hand towards the cushion, she found a large parcel placed upon it, which struck her as being curious; so she moved it away,—it felt like large books, but of course she would not open it,—"something for grandpapa," she thought, "which the servant

has placed here by mistake." Passing her fingers over the cushion, she read—

"Maud will find her exercise wrapped up in this paper parcel."

What could it be? what could it be? In her hurry she put the slate she was holding only half-way on the table, and the moment after it went down with a crash; but her hands were busy with the tiresome knot, which seemed, as is usual in such cases, to bid defiance to all her efforts to loosen it. At last it slipped, and came undone, and lo! there were large books within.

"Books, books," said Maud to herself; "what could grandpapa mean? They can't be of any use to me."

She turned the cover back,—the page was not smooth and even like other books,—there was something raised upon it—letters of the same kind and shape as she had been accustomed to read. The title-page bore the words—

"Guillaume Tell; ou, la Suisse Libre."

It was, in short, a book printed for the special use of the blind, in the French tongue, which she was by this time able to understand. The type was clear and bold, and quite as easy to



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MAUD'S BIRTHDAY PRESENT.



read as the letters she had been accustomed to. The other books were the four Gospels in French (Les quatre Saints Evangiles), and an Atlas, with the maps raised upon the same principle. No such books could be got in England at that time, and her kind grandpapa had caused them to be sent over from France for her especial use.

Oh, how delighted she was! Here was a treasure of whose existence even she had no idea. Her hands were trembling with excitement, and tears of pleasure were streaming down her flushed cheeks, as her grandpapa entered the room. He had witnessed the whole scene through the half-opened door, and his benevolent heart was quite as full as Maud's.

"Come, Maudie, we must have no further attempt at lessons to-day," he said, as she threw her arms round his neck; "we must have no reading or anything else in that line. Let us shut up the study, and if you particularly want these large books, we can take them down stairs."

So Maud spent the rest of the morning in various romps with Bustle, and decking him out with ribbons,—in helping Mrs. Jackson in her arrangements (she called it *help*, though nothing

that she could do would further Mrs. Jackson's plans much),—and in bringing branches of laurel to dress up the kitchen, for Mary Green and one or two others of Maud's village friends and acquaintance were to take tea with the servants in the evening. Then she sat down to the piano for a time, and rambled through half a score of wild melodies, some of them old favourites and others the effusions of her own fancy. And many times, in spite of Mr. Ashton's prohibition of the lessons, her fingers stole over a page of one of her books, just to try how far she could read and understand it. Then, after dinner, Ellen came according to promise, and Maud and she were soon fully occupied together. She shared Maud's delight at her grandpapa's present, especially as the type was such that she could read with her eyes while Maud read with her fingers. She was not so advanced in French as Maud, who, from frequent exercise in reading and writing it, and still more frequent practice in speaking it with Mr. Ashton, had acquired considerable proficiency in it. It would be a great pleasure for them to read these books together.

They all had a long ramble in the fields in

the pleasant afternoon of that October day. Maud could not see how beautiful the landscape looked, with the various tints of the changing foliage, and the strong rich colouring of the autumn sky; but she heard the admiring exclamations of the others, and thought and felt how glorious they must be. They came past the dear old beech-tree—dear to them all, and to Mr. Ashton united with so many delightful remembrances. They must not sit upon the bank now, for the moss is very damp, and turning brown; a dozen squirrels scamper off as they approach, disturbed at their merry banquet on the beech-nuts, the shells of which crack crisply beneath their feet as they walk under its branches.

"A pleasant place to sit in summer," Mr. Ashton said, "but rather aguish now. What a fine old tree it is! How many changes have taken place in this world of men since this beechtree was a sapling! And it will stand here, perhaps, when you and I are laid low, girls; and somebody else will come, and admire, and talk like we do of the changes it has seen."

"How old do you think it is, then, grand-papa?"

"I cannot judge, my dear. These trees are

said to be capable of attaining to an immense age—from eight hundred to a thousand years. This one is just beginning to decay, and yet the oldest people in Springfield cannot remember it otherwise than it is now."

"What a many birthdays it must have seen,"

said Ellen, laughingly.

"Yes, Ellen, and yet at the last the axe will lay it low; and thus it may teach us the lesson which we should always remember, but which the recurrence of every birthday should impress still more deeply upon our minds,—that however long we may live, our life must at last come to a close, and that every birthday lessens the number. Whether the voyage be long or short, stormy or fair, prosperous or unhappy, we shall all get into port at the end. Let us hope that it may be a peaceful one."

When they arrived at the house, they found Mr. and Mrs. Ansted waiting their coming, for Mr. Ashton had invited them to spend the evening there. The girls hastened to change their walking dress for a costume more suited for a festival occasion, and came down prepared for a pleasant evening. They were afterwards joined by the youthful members of one or two farmers'

families in the neighbourhood, of whom Maud did not know a great deal, but who had shown some kindness towards her. Many agreeable little speeches were made, and many good wishes expressed; and Maud felt very happy, though she could not see the beaming faces of her friends. After tea, Mr. Ashton, for the benefit of a group of his youthful guests, fought some of his former battles over again, and at their request described, with full particulars, the circumstances of the action in which he lost his left hand. Mr. and Mrs. Ansted set others at various games, and inspecting various albums and picture-books: the piano was opened, and the girls took turns with songs and instrumental pieces of various character and quality. Maud took an opportunity once or twice of stealing out into the kitchen among her humbler friends, for she valued their kind feeling and good will none the less because they were poor and lowly. And at the last, everybody having sung, or played, or excused themselves but Maud, the guests began to be pressing for her performance; and she, never having done anything of the kind before strangers, was rather timid at undertaking it; but not to look awkward or seem disobliging,

she consented at once, and taking her seat at the instrument, sang a little plaintive ditty which she often sang to her grandpapa—as simple as it was pretty. And very pretty the youthful singer looked too, with long fair ringlets drooping over her shoulders, in a dress of plain white muslin, with a blue sash. Her face wore a bright and happy expression, which rendered her naturally pleasing features positively beautiful for the time; the flush upon her cheek was of a deeper tint than usual, and those large eyes, so fixed and motionless, would have been so handsome if they had only been gifted with light and expression. Everybody present felt at the time a peculiar interest in her; and when she began the prelude to another song, every one was hushed and silent, and every eye was bent on her.

MAUD'S SONG.

They tell me of the glorious earth,
And of the glorious sky;
Of the many things that glad the heart,
When imag'd in the eye.

And all is closed and dark to me,
Those joys I cannot know;
Yet do I not repine or grieve,
Since God hath willed it so.

Though He withholds this precious gift,
A gift to few denied,
To Him I owe my life and friends,
And many joys beside.

In this life I may never know
The pleasures of the light,
May never look on human things,
With the gift of human sight.

But visions of a better land
Are treasured in my mind;
Where beams the light, that hath no night,
And where no eye is blind.

There were few in the room who were not affected, even to tears, as Maud finished her song. The piano was closed at once, and no one thought of opening it again that evening,-no one wished to banish from his mind the mournfully pleasant feeling which her singing had produced. It was not so much the words or the music as the artless, modest, half-plaintive manner in which she sang, and the evident circumstance that the words exactly expressed her own feelings. Where she got the song from she could not say. She told Mr. Ashton afterwards, that she seemed to have had it floating in her mind for a long, long time, with an indistinct recollection of some one having repeated it to her years before.

The party broke up shortly after; many of its members cherished the remembrance of it for years, and with a few, I am sure, it remains even to this day.

CHAPTER VIII.

LABOURS OF LOVE.

"So let me ever learn to give,
Pleasure and blessing while I live;
With kindly deed, and smiling face,
A sunbeam, in my lowly place,"—MORAL SONGS.

THE kind friends who watched so carefully over Maud's welfare became, about this time, rather anxious on account of her health. Her constitution had not been strong at any period, and, like the greater number of children born in India of English parents, she never enjoyed that robust and vigorous health which we so commonly meet with in children at home. Besides this, she was very tall for her age-her strength had not kept pace with her growth in stature. Mrs. Jackson was alarmed at her frequent complaints of lassitude and weariness, even when she had not been exerting herself, and when there was no cause to account for such feelings. She was troubled, too, with weakness of the chest; the slightest exposure was sufficient to bring on a severe cough, which could not be got rid of without great difficulty. The medical attendant said she was growing too fast; there was nothing to indicate any disease, and care and attention were all that she required: and these would not be wanting, for the kind housekeeper watched every movement that she made; she could not venture out of doors without undergoing an inspection at her motherly hands, to see that she was duly shawled and wrapped up, and that she had her thick boots on. Half-a-dozen times a day she heard her serious admonition:—

"Take care of yourself, Miss Maud; the winds is so very uncertain, and you can't watch the sky, you know, to see whether it's going to rain. If you get another of them bad coughs, we shall have such sad work to get it out of you again."

There was another circumstance, also, which occasioned Mr. Ashton some uneasiness,—she had grown so very serious and thoughtful. Not only such beyond her age, for that had always been the case, but these feelings had increased upon her lately, or she had shown them more clearly; and this, even more than her delicate appearance, made Mr. Ashton fearful. She came

to him one day with a special request,—she wanted to have some serious conversation with him on a subject which had been long on her mind.

"Grandpapa, I think I should like to do some-

thing good."

"Something good, my child! What do you

mean by that?"

"I mean that I should like to do something that would be of use to other people. I have often heard you say that we are not sent into the world to please ourselves only, and to work for ourselves only, and I'm afraid that I haven't done much beside that hitherto."

"But you are only a child, Maud; and not

able to engage in anything useful as yet."

"Even a child can do something good, grandpapa, and I have often heard you say that too; but I am more than a child now—I am in my

fourteenth year."

"But what can you wish to do, my dear? Remember that you are not so strong as some people; if the weather is at all damp, you can't go out without running the risk of catching a bad cough which would lay you up for weeks."

"I would not go out in the damp weather.

Is there nothing useful which I could do at home?"

"Your first duty, Maud, is to yourself and your friends. You are to take care of your own health; God has not given it to you for you to risk it needlessly; and you are to think of those who love you, and wish to have your presence and keep you well."

"I have thought of all this, grandpapa; but I want to ask you whether there is nothing good and useful that I can do without injuring my health, and without alarming or grieving you and

my other dear friends?"

"I cannot think of anything. If you were well, and if you were not——if you had the use of your eyes, Maudie, perhaps we might find something to gratify your desire, which is certainly a very proper one; but in your present circumstances, I don't know of anything that it would be right to put upon you, or, indeed, of anything that you could do."

The matter ended there for that time, and Mr. Ashton thought it perhaps only a fancy that had crossed her mind. But Maud had not forgotten it; and some weeks after, on a fine

clear day, as he was preparing for some visits among the poor, Maud asked if he would suffer her to accompany him.

"Why, Maud? What can be the use of your

going into sick rooms?"

"Oh, I should like it, grandpapa. I have wished to do so for a long time. Please let me

go with you."

"I am going to Alan Thompson's first, but he is ill of fever, so you must not come in there. You can go with me to John Lane's, if you like, and to Griffiths's, where the child was burnt the other day. And there's your old acquaintance Mary Green, too, who is laid up with rheumatism; you can call in and talk to her while I go round to Pearce, the thatcher's, who has had a bad fall."

Maud was delighted.

"There is another thing you can do, Maudie, as you seem fond of such things,—go to Mrs. Jackson, and ask her for a pot of elder-flower ointment, and take it with you for that poor burnt child."

Good Mrs. Jackson shook her head when Maud told her where she was going.

"As if you weren't sickly enough yourself

already, without going into other people's sick houses, and pertiklerly into them Griffiths's, which is such very dirty people."

"Oh, grandpapa is going, and says I may go with him; and I think it will do me good.

Thank you, Mrs. Jackson."

And away she went with the ointment, Mrs. Jackson calling after her, as she shut the door—

"You're sure you've got your thick boots on, Miss Maud?"

The poor burnt child was very ill indeed, and lay on its little bed in the corner of the dirty room, groaning with pain. The apartment smelt very faint and sickly; but Mr. Ashton took a bottle of chloride of lime from his pocket and sprinkled it over the floor—then covering the little patient carefully over, opened the lattice for a few minutes, till the air was perfectly sweet again. The child had fallen into the fire in a fit, when there was no one by, and was very sadly burnt about the shoulders. Maud took its hot hand in hers, and stroked it,—she had never been so close to illness and suffering before. The nice cooling ointment was applied, and they left the little one much easier.

Poor old Mary Green!—how pleased she was when Mr. Ashton opened the door and left Maud with her!

"Sit ye down, Miss Maud; it's long enough since I've seen ye. Lotty, put a chair here for Miss Maud; don't ye see she can't get one for herself?"

This was to a little girl whom Mary had to do for her during her illness.

"How tall you have got, surely! You've grown more in heighth than in flesh, my dear; but indeed it's many a day since your shadder darkened my door."

"I've had a bad cough for some time, Mary, and grandpapa wouldn't let me come out; but I hope it has gone now, and the spring will be coming soon, and then I can walk over often. I am sorry to find you so ill, though, Mary."

"Oh, it's just a touch of the old complaint—rheumatiz, you know,—it gets worse every time, and I must expect it now. I'm not so young as I used to be, Miss Maud: eighty-three years old was I the seventh of last month,—it's a great age, my dear."

"It is, indeed. To me it seems surprising

how any one can live to such an age."

"That's just what my dear old master said the day before he died, poor gentleman. He had had the gout every year for three and forty year, and he said it was fair wonderful that he had stood it so long."

"You have had all the longer time to get ready for another and better world," said Maud.

"Yes, my dear, and a poor ignorant thing I am, after all. If I'd nothin' better to trust to than myself and my own larnin', I don't know how it 'ud go with me. Oh, Lotty, you've let all the stitches down."

The little girl was knitting a stocking, and, engrossed in her observation of Maud, she had

slipped out one of the needles.

"It's a pair of hose that I'd almost finished when I was laid by," said Mary, "and bein' that my feet was cold, and I wanted 'em badly, I set the little gal to finish 'em; but she bungles sadly."

"I'll take them home, and do them for you,"

said Maud.

Mary would not hear of it; but Maud insisted, and declared that it would just find her in the kind of employment that she wished for a day or two, and finally made the girl bring them to her, and rolled them up to take them away.

Here Mr. Ashton put his head in at the door, and told Lotty to come and fetch some broth which Mrs. Jackson had got ready for Mary, and Maud bade her good morning, promising to see her again shortly; and the starling, jumping down from the oven, screamed something after her which he meant for a farewell.

Maud's mind was perfectly at rest that evening: she felt as if she had been doing a little good. As she sat with her grandpapa in the drawing-room, her fingers very busy in finishing Mary Green's stockings, she said—

"Some one told me once of a certain emperor who always tried to do some good action in every day of his life; and when he came to think over the events of the day, if he found that it had gone by without this, he used to say,—'I have lost a day!' I always liked that anecdote, grandpapa; I think he must have been a wise man. I should wish to do the same."

"Very good, dear. I hope you are pleased with what you have done to-day. There is certainly much comfort for our own minds to be derived from attending to the wants of other people."

There was a long pause, during which the knit-

ting-needles clicked away faster than ever.

"When I am not able to go out, I could sometimes help poor people in this way,"—holding up the knitting—"I cannot do needlework, grandpapa, unless it is very plain; but knitting I can do well and easily, and I might as well employ my fingers in this way as for them to be idle."

"If it gives you any pleasure, Maud, I don't see why you may not do it,—it would be making

vourself useful."

"That is just what I want to be."

Another long pause, with the same sharp accompaniment as before. Mr. Ashton could see that there was something on her mind; but he waited for her to speak.

"Grandpapa, what a good thing it is that I

have learned to read and spell."

"It is, indeed, my dear."

"You cannot think what pleasure I derive

from it. I have gone all through my French Gospels, and nearly through Guillaume Tell. I had most of the Gospels off by heart in English, and it is so nice to compare the two together."

"You have not been an idle pupil, I am sure,

Maudie."

"It must be a delightful thing to be able to teach other people, grandpapa. It is a good thing to have knowledge, but it is not of much use if one keeps it to one's self."

"Knowledge was never intended to be hoarded up, dear,—it is only useful when it is imparted to others, and kept in circulation for the general

benefit."

"I should like to have been a teacher," said

Maud. Then presently after-

"Do you think I know anything that is worth teaching to others, grandpapa? and if I do, do you think I could teach it?"

"Do you wish for something of the kind,

Maud?"

"Oh, grandpapa, I have wished it for a long, long time."

"But what can you do with such things?"

"I have a plan in my mind—may I tell you? You wont be grieved with me, will you?"

" No, my child."

And, putting aside her knitting, she stole to Mr. Ashton's side, and took hold of his hand.

"Grandpapa, I wish to have a class in the Sunday-school."

"You surprise me, my dear. What can have put that into your head?"

"Ellen Ansted has just taken one, and I think

I could manage one, too."

"But how can you teach a class? How can you correct their reading, for instance, when you cannot see them?"

"Is that your only objection, grandpapa,—because I am blind? Would you let me take a class if I could see?"

"Perhaps I might, if you were well enough."

"I think it would do me good,—it would give me employment. I shall get you to read over to me the chapter for the lesson till I have got it by heart; and then, when the girls read it over on Sunday, I shall know whether their reading is correct. All the Collects I know, and the Catechism with Scripture proofs; and I think, if you will allow me to try, I shall be able to do some little good."

"And if I should think it unwise, and should not consent, Maud?"

"I shall feel very sorry, for I have been thinking about it so long; but I shall know that your judgment will be kind and just."

"Well, we must hear what Mr. Ansted says, and then we can talk it over again. But in the damp weather,—what will you do then, Maud?"

"I shall ask Mrs. Jackson to let me have my class at home."

Maud carried the day in this matter also, and in a few Sundays after she was duly installed in her post as a teacher in Mr. Ansted's Sundayschool. It was a novel thing both for the teacher and her pupils, but she succeeded even better than she had expected. One or two of the girls seemed inclined at first to take advantage of her blindness; but her kind manner soon won their affection, and Maud's class became one of the most tractable and best conducted in the school.

Her hands were now full of occupation, and as the spring advanced, she appeared to improve in health, and to have greater strength for carrying out the plans of usefulness which she proposed to herself. She was better known and more beloved than ever in the village now that she went often to the cottages of the people; the poor used to bless her in their hearts when they saw her; her cheerful greeting was so pleasant, they said, and she was always thinking of some fresh kindness. Even Lawrence Lee, the cobbler,—who was for ever at the alehouse, and who had insulted and abused the parson,—was civil and respectful to her when she talked to him. And as for Maud herself, she found a happiness in trying to do good.

CHAPTER IX.

THE LOSS OF AN OLD FRIEND.

"Beneath that lowly roof,
Lo! Death doth keep his state;
Enter,—no crowds attend,
Enter,—no guards defend,
His palace-gate."—Southey.

As the fine weather came on, Maud was seen more frequently making cautious progress through the village street, and finding her way to the houses where she wished to go, with an accuracy that was surprising to witness; for when she had once got acquainted with the people, she often made her visit alone, and she preferred to do so. Bustle was generally with her, it is true, but he did not act, as the dogs of many blind persons do, in the capacity of a guide. Bustle would never have submitted to have a string attached to his collar, and to go steadily forward with a slow and measured pace, foregoing all his wayward tricks and all his tendency to ramble; and indeed it was not necessary, for Maud knew the road without his help. Tapping gently on the

kerb-stone or on the fence with her little walking-stick, she felt her way; and the cottagers, when they heard that sound at their garden-gate, came and opened the door, and welcomed her to their houses. Large demands were made on Maud's account upon Mrs. Jackson's department, in the shape of mutton-broth and arrow-root, and such like comforts for the sick and weakly. From anybody else that worthy woman would have considered such demands presumptuous and unwarrantable, but coming from Maud she did not think for a moment of the trouble which they caused her; they were only additional proofs to her of that dear young lady's kind-heartedness,—and in Mrs. Jackson's eyes they only served to increase her resemblance to "the blessed angels in heaven," to whom she so often compared her.

Maud was tapping her way past the school play-ground one day, and the children were busy and merry at their games within,—the sound of their mirthfulness always had a charm for her, and she could have hearkened for hours to the shouts, and laughter, and busy hurrying to and fro which accompany the sports of children.

She stood at the gate to listen: presently she heard a timid step approach her, and a child's hand was pushed into hers. Maud stroked it: it did not feel particularly clean, or as if its usual condition were one of cleanliness.

"Well, my little child, and what is your name?"

"Jossy Griffiths, please, mum."

"Oh, Jossy, is it? And so you are now quite better, and able to come to school again; and is the pain all gone now?"

Jossy was only seven years old, and, not being a very sharp lad, was not equal to any sustained conversation, so he held his peace, and said nothing.

Maud passed her hand over his neck—the skin was wrinkled and drawn up, and the scar, which his burning had left, was still remaining there, and would most likely remain for life. He was clothed in a new pinafore made by his mother's own hands; and this was the first step towards a reformation in her system of management, which, at Mr. Ashton's suggestion, she intended to make. Maud felt the new garment, and an expression of pleasure lit up her face, for she had

purchased the stuff for it out of her own pocketmoney.

"Well, Jossy, go and play and enjoy yourself; this is better than lying in your own bed at home, smarting all over with pain, isn't it?"

"Here," answered Jossy, making a great

effort, "you may have this,-I like you."

And the child put a marble into her hand, and ran off again to his play.

It was a smooth, white marble; one of that kind which boys consider the most valuable; and Maud smiled as she held it in her fingers. She knew that it was a token of the child's gratitude for the little kindnesses which she had shown towards him in his illness. It was the most valuable thing that Jossy possessed, and it was as much to him to make that present as it would be to a rich man to give a purse of gold. It was only a round piece of stone, but the boy's motive and feeling made it precious. So Maud valued that marble very highly, and laid it up at home among her choicest treasures.

The returning spring did not bring with it returning health to Mary Green; her rheumatism had increased upon her, and her constitu-

tion appeared to be rapidly breaking up. Maud reckoned her among her "regular patients," as she termed them, and used generally, in fine weather, to call at Mary's cottage once in every day. Little Lotty was now established as an inmate there, to wait upon the aged invalid; and whenever anything beyond her power was to be done, there was no lack of kind neighbours who were willing to do a good turn for Mary, for she was much respected among them in a humble way. Everybody said that she would never leave her bed again: she herself believed that her course was almost run; and a domestic bereavement (for such it was to her), which occurred just at this time, served to impress this belief more deeply upon her mind. Her faithful old friend and servant died-the tortoiseshell cat. It might have seemed a trivial thing to any other person, but it was a real grief and a sad loss to bedridden and aged Mary. She had kept the cat more than twenty years; he had shared her solitary meals, nestled in her lap, basked in the chimney corner so long that he seemed almost like a relation. Now he was dead,—the old brown platter which Mary had

used so often to mix food in for her favourite was of no more service; she had it carefully washed and set on high among the old-fashioned china on the mantelpiece; and at Mary's special request, Mr. Ashton's gardener, Weeks, came with his spade to give the deceased an honourable burial. All this would have been ludicrous in most cases, but it was not so in this; for Mary had got the idea firmly fixed in her mind that now her favourite was gone, she herself would soon die also. In her simple-heartedness and ignorance she had often thought to herself, -" I have no relations in the world; few people care for me; my cat is my most constant and faithful friend,—we have grown old together, and it is he who would miss me the most if I were to die." So this event was really a blow to poor old Mary; and though the starling still hopped about and chuckled to himself, yet she did not care so much about him. He had not been with her so long-he was not so tractable and affectionate. So Mary mourned with sincere sorrow over her old friend, and it seemed to her as if nothing would supply the loss of him.

And yet, with all this, poor Mary did not look

ignorantly upon death. She knew that she was coming near to her end, and she did not fear it. Without making any great profession of religion, without setting up to be in any way better than her neighbours, Mary had nevertheless lived consistently and soberly, and had acted according to the little knowledge which she possessed in such matters. Little it was, indeed; but still enough to guide her, even in the most important matter of preparing for the end of life. No one had been more regular than she had in her attendance at church, and no one had been wont to join in the service with greater devotion than she. Mary could not read,—so a Prayer-book was of no use to her; but she knew most of the service from memory, and never failed to let her voice be heard in the responses of the congregation. The neighbours spoke kindly of Mary, for when she was well, she was always ready to do them a service; and for nursing, and homeremedies, and herb-drinks, and things of that kind, her experience was of great use to them. She was without education—but that was not her fault-and she was superstitious because of her ignorance; but these things did not prevent

her from doing more good in her homely way than many people of refined and cultivated minds would have dreamed of doing. Mr. Ansted, who very often visited her, found it a difficult task to lead Mary to talk about her own thoughts in the prospect of death; but he did not think the worse of her on that account, for he had often found that persons who are the most talkative on other subjects are very timid and reserved upon that. There was one thing which he regarded with pleasure—that often, when he went in unexpectedly, he found little Lotty reading at Mary's request a chapter from the Bible.

"I can't read myself, you know, sir," Mary would say, "and my memory has got so very bad, that I've clean forgotten many good things that I know'd at one time; so that I like to have them read over again to me, and they come back quite fresh, as it seems."

Poor Mary! she thought very little of herself; she knew her own ignorance, and judged herself unworthy; and she went for help and guidance to that record of truth which God has given to man. What could the highest and wisest of the earth do more? and how many of them would have done less!

She talked to Maud more freely and openly than she did to any one else. Perhaps this was because she looked upon her as a child, and felt more at home with her. Maud held a conversation with her, on one occasion, which she remembered long after. She walked over to her cottage on a Saturday evening, after a very close and sultry day. There did not seem to be a breath of air stirring,—the men were standing at their garden-gates as she passed, looking up at the sky, and wishing for a shower of rain. Mary seemed better, however, and welcomed her visitor with more spirit and liveliness than she had shown of late.

"Mrs. Jackson has sent you some jelly, Mary," said Maud, giving over a little basket into Lotty's hands.

"Many thanks to you, Miss Maud, and to her, too, I'm sure. Sit down and rest ye a bit, and let us have a little nice talk; sure it always does me good."

"Well, Mary, you talk, and I'll listen to

you."

"That wont do altogether, either; for I don't profit much like from hearin' my own voice. I'm gittin' tired of talkin', and when you've bin as long in this world as I have, my dear, you'll be tired of it, too."

"I shall never live so long as you have lived," said Maud.

"Perhaps not. I never thought I should git to such an age. But what is it, a'ter all, Miss Maud! It seems like a dream to me. To think that I should ha' bin eighty-three year and more in this world, and to know such a vary little a'ter all! But in my young days larnin' was little thought of; and now every little child in the place knows more than I do, and Lotty there can read in the Testament, though it's true she has to spell the biggest part of her words."

"There is one kind of knowledge that you have, Mary, I hope—I mean the best knowledge of all. You haven't lived all that long time without finding out how to die peacefully and happily."

"I have tried hard to find it out, Miss Maud; I have tried very hard. There is only One, you know, that can teach us that; and what can a

poor old thing like me do more than ask Him to make it all clear?"

"'Ask, and it shall be given you,'" said Maud.
"That is what He told us Himself."

"Yes; and He'll keep His word. And bein' that He's all-wise Himself, perhaps He wont take account of my knowin' so little, and bein' so unworthy."

Their conversation was interrupted by the rolling of thunder in the distance. A storm had gathered quickly, and it seemed likely to be a very heavy one. Peal after peal followed in rapid succession, till at last it appeared to be quite over their heads, and the large drops of rain poured down with a dull sound upon the thatch, and rattled heavily against the lattice. Maud and Mary sat silent for a long time, and listened; both sharing that solemn feeling which almost everybody is conscious of when such a storm shakes the earth,—the feeling that the Almighty One is sending forth the lightning as His arrows, and uttering His voice in the thunder.* When the storm was passing away, and

^{*} Psalm lxxvii. 17, 18.

the claps were getting fainter and fewer, Mary broke the silence—

"The rain is almost over now, Miss Maud, and you'll be goin' home, I reckon. But before you go, there's one thing I want to ask of you as a favour. There was two dumb things, as you know, that I was vary fond of. One of 'em is dead, and I've no call to trouble about him; but there's the other (which I can hardly call him a dumb thing) sittin' over there a-top of the oven, and I should like to be sure, before anything happens to me, that he'll be taken care of. Do you think they'd let him be up at Mr. Ashton's by-and-bye? He don't take much lookin' a'ter; and as for his food, that's not worth mentionin'. I've only had him seven year; but I've petted him a good deal, and it's almost like leavin' one's own kin behind."

Maud promised that her wish should be attended to.

"And now my mind's quite easy, Miss. As for these few little things that I have here, they can be sold to pay for my buryin'. And if there's anything left, there's a many poor people in Springfield that would be glad of a loaf of

bread or something of that kind, and it would maybe make 'em think kindly of poor old Mary when she's gone. And now, Miss Maudie, dear, please to say me something out of the Bible."

Maud thought for a moment what would be best suited for this occasion. She then repeated some verses which had come into her mind just before, when the thunderstorm was shaking the house, and she had been sensible of a little fear.

"'Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe

in God, believe also in me.

"'In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would not have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

"'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself,

that where I am, there ye may be also.

"'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No

man cometh unto the Father but by me.

"'Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled; neither let it be afraid.'"

The next day was Sunday-most calm and

cool after the wholesome thunderstorm of the night before. The service, always so peaceful in that retired village church, seemed to Maud more quiet and holy than ever. After the morning service was over, Mr. Ashton-as he frequently did-went into the vicarage with Mr. Ansted on some parish matter, and Maud took the opportunity of walking round to inquire for Mary Green. Lotty did not answer the door when she tapped at it; so, as she had done many times before, she lifted the latch and let herself in. The room was very quiet, and she supposed that Lotty had taken advantage of Mary's being asleep and had run home for something. She sat down, therefore, by the bedside, and waited for a few moments. There seemed to be an unnatural stillness about the room. Mary's sleep must be a very deep one, for she could not even hear her breathe. The starling, too, was silent, and he usually had a greeting for her when she entered the house. She put out her hand,—it touched another hand which was stretched out on the coverlid, but it was cold and stiff. The touch sent a chill through her-she knew the truth at once: for the first time in her life she was face to face with the dead. Her first half-fearful impulse was to leave the house as quickly as she could, but she thought it wise to check this feeling. Mary had been her friend,—she had been with her for an hour only the night before without feeling any fear, and why should death have made her terrible? So she passed her hands over those cold features; and when Lotty's mother came in a few minutes after, Maud had assured herself that they wore a pleasant expression, and that a smile had settled on her lips, as if she had fallen asleep, and was dreaming happy dreams.

Just as the bells were beginning to chime for service on that sunny Sabbath morning, old Mary Green had indeed passed into her last

solemn slumber.

CHAPTER X.

A FAMILY MEETING.

"The dearest spot of earth to me
Is home, sweet home!
There, where love is so endearing,
All the world is not so cheering
As home, sweet home."—W. T. WRIGHTON.

THE Springfield postman was rather a curious character. He thought a great deal of himself by reason of the office which he sustained. He always announced his arrival in the village by a loud flourish upon a kind of huntsman's bugle which he carried with him, and he went through the same performance when he delivered letters at the chief houses there and in the neighbourhood. At the vicarage, and at Mr. Ashton's, and at one or two of the largest farmers' houses round, he was wont to let them know that he was coming, by a blast upon his horn; and at Ninestones Hall he made a still grander display of his musical powers. You would have expected that some grand personage was approaching, and would have been surprised

to find, at the end of all the noise, that it was only Tom Baynes, the village postman.

He came to Mr. Ashton's with greater importance than usual one morning. Maud heard his trumpeting and quavering as he came up the gravel walk, and walked down the shrubbery, as she often did, to take the letters from his hands.

"Three letters for W. Ashton, Esq., miss, and one for Jenny Eldridge, directed to this house. Is that right?"

"Oh, yes; that's our kitchen-maid."

"Ah, from her mother, p'raps; I couldn't read the direction hardly, it's so bad. But there's two-and-eightpence to pay on one of them letters for Mr. Ashton, please, miss."

"Oh, a letter from India!" said Maud; and away she went, as fast as was consistent with safety, to find out Mr. Ashton.

Be sure that that was the letter opened first, and be sure also that Maud's features wanted their usual calm and patient expression while Mr. Ashton was busy opening the seal. Though directed to him, it was as much Maud's property as his, and so we may as well give it to our readers in full. It was from Mrs. Summers:—

"My dear Papa and Maudie,

"I sit down to write a few lines to you with greater pleasure than I have ever felt in writing to you from India before; and it is because I have the good news to communicate that we shall very shortly be at liberty to return to dear old England again. We had not expected this for some months to come yet, though Mr. Summers's successor has been appointed a considerable time. But my dear husband has not been in his usual health lately, and in consideration of this he has obtained leave to anticipate the proper time of his departure. We expect that one or two additional clerks will arrive by the next vessel, and arrangements can then be made at once for us to come away. I am very busy in getting ready for our voyage, as perhaps it may not be more than a week or a fortnight before we start, and if we have fair weather, we may perhaps follow quickly upon this letter. I cannot say here how delighted we all are at the prospect of seeing you, and that some months earlier than we had expected. I hope and trust that we may meet safely again, and settle down in our own country for the rest of our lives.

Mr. Summers says he shall look out for some nice little place near Springfield, so that we can see each other every day. What happiness that will be! I have numbers of presents for you both, and dear Arty has a box full of shells that he has saved up for 'sister Maudie.' He has grown such a sweet little fellow.

"This is a short letter, but I shall keep all the news till we meet,—then I can tell it you by word of mouth, which is so much better than writing. We hope that Maud has quite lost her cough, and that she will have got up her strength again by the time we return. With kindest love to you both, in which Mr. Summers unites, I am, yours most affectionately,

"CAROLINE SUMMERS."

A postscript was added in Mr. Summers's handwriting, saying that, if possible, they would get a boat and come ashore at Wandsea (a village on the coast, about fifteen miles from Springfield), as this would save them the journey round to Southampton; and they could have their luggage sent on afterwards from thence.

"Well, Maudie," said Mr. Ashton, smiling, and

trying to speak calmly, "this is the shortest letter that mamma ever sent us. What do you think? Is it worth the two-and-eightpence?"

"Oh, grandpapa, you are only in fun, I know. How delightful it is! I can't talk about it—it

seems so surprising."

And Maud seated herself on Mr. Ashton's knee, and they both sat silent for a long time, for they were both too happy to speak. If Tom Baynes, the postman, could have peeped through the window just then, and witnessed the effect which that letter had produced, it would have infused new power into that wonderful horn of his, and made him more self-important than ever.

"This wont do, my child," said Mr. Ashton, starting up, "we shall have our grand Indian friends upon us before we know where we are. We must get to work at something to prepare for them. Mrs. Jackson—Mrs. Jackson"—(as that worthy personage glanced in at the half-opened door)—

"We must have the best bedroom got ready at once to receive company, and the dining-room and drawing-room must be thoroughly cleaned and set to rights, if you please; and we must have the plumber in to mend that pipe in the bath-room, for these people wont be able to do without that, I know;—and—and—have you a pretty good stock of everything in the kitchen, Mrs. Jackson,—everything eatable, I mean?"

Mrs. Jackson's face, during the delivery of this speech, had passed through various shades of expression—a frown, a stare, a blank look of dismay, and, at last, utter astonishment prevailed over all.

"Goodness gracious me, Mr. Ashton! savin' your presence, sir; and what am I to do first, sir? And please to go through it again, for it's almost as bad as a catechism, which I never could remember them things."

"Why, the long and the short of the matter is this, my good lady,"—and Mr. Ashton spoke very slowly,—"we have just got a letter this morning from Mrs. Summers, and she tells us that they are coming home, and that most likely they will be here in a day or two. I know that you will make all needful preparations, Mrs. Jackson, and so I'll leave it with you."

Mrs. Jackson now awoke to a full sense of

the exigency, and Mr. Ashton, feeling rather ashamed of having said so much about household matters, and on second thoughts dreading the awful confusion of a general clean, said—

"After all, I think these rooms will do very well with a little of your management, Mrs. Jackson; we need not have the carpets up, and all that sort of thing. And besides, I don't think there will be time for it."

"Leave it to me, sir; leave it to me, sir, and we'll see all about it."

So away went Mrs. Jackson in a state of high excitement, and with her ruddy face of a much deeper tint than usual.

Mr. Ashton and Maud walked up to the vicarage to communicate the glad intelligence; and while the latter was pouring her joy into Ellen's ear, Mr. Ashton looked over the shipping list in The Times with Mr. Ansted, to see if any information could be gained respecting the vessels from India, due or nearly due. The letter had been forwarded by the Triton, and the ship advertised to sail from Calcutta next in order to that was the Shooting Star, which vessel was already fitting out when the other left. By the Shooting

Star, then, in all probability they would come, or, at all events, by the next ship after; but there was no information about that. They then discussed the weather for the last three months,—capital winds in these latitudes, Mr. Ashton said, they could not have wished for better. If they had come by the Shooting Star, and if she was a decent sailer, they could not be many days off at that time. And so they talked and speculated on the subject, till the people at the vicarage got almost as excited as themselves.

"And now you must stop and share our early dinner," said Mrs. Ansted, "for I am sure they

will all be busy at home."

Mr. Ashton said he would just go down and tell the gardener to get the lawn mown and trimmed up, and would return at once. And it was well that he did accept Mrs. Ansted's offer, since there would have been small chance of anything like a comfortable dinner that day in his own house. For in the short space of time he had been absent, Mrs. Jackson had set every soul in the place to work; the dining-room and drawing-room were stripped of their furniture, and the gardener was too busy beating the car-

pets to be able to give any attention to the lawn. So Mr. Ashton gave in with a good grace,—resigned the management of affairs entirely into Mrs. Jackson's active hands, and went back in quiet to his friends at the vicarage. When Maud and he returned home late in the evening, the process was complete; everything had been restored to its proper place, and all was so clean and spotless that, as Mrs. Jackson said, with very pardonable pride, "You might even eat your food off the floor."

Several days passed by in very anxious suspense—the more anxious because it was so uncertain when it would terminate. One day was distinguished from the rest by the occurrence of one of those heavy storms of wind and rain which often break in on the pleasant mildness of the autumn, and this stormy weather was the source of great uneasiness to Maud. She had heard of people who had been wrecked even within sight of their port,—of sailors who had been absent from their homes and families for many, many years, and whose ship had escaped the dangers of the wide ocean only to founder on the rocks close beneath their dwelling. She

could hardly believe Mr. Ashton when he told her that perhaps the storm would hardly reach as far as Wandsea, and that a sailor in a good vessel, and with plenty of sea-room, would snap his fingers at such a capful of wind. Much of Maud's earthly treasure was now at the mercy of the winds and waves: better treasure than gold and silver—hearts that loved her, and friends that she had long been parted from. No wonder that she was anxious and fearful till they should be safe on shore.

"Get to your duties, Maud," said Mr. Ashton; "there is nothing that keeps one calm in excitement and suspense better than forcing one's self to go about one's regular work just as if nothing unusual were in the wind. I mean to walk out into the farm-yard, and see about the thatching of that last stack of wheat. What would you have done to-day, now, if you had not been unsettled in this way?"

"Why, I hardly know, grandpapa. I should perhaps have read a little, and called on two or three people in the village, and taken a walk with Ellen, and done some knitting, and then,—oh, I had almost forgotten,—I should have asked

you to read me the ninth chapter of St. John for my lesson at the Sunday-school."

"Well, now, go and do all this, my dear, and you will find yourself much better and more comfortable than you will do if you stop here all day, feeling out for the weather, and wondering when your parents will come."

So Maud made her calls in the village, and took her walk with Ellen, and shared her sisterly anxieties respecting Henry—who was now at the university, and had been working very hard—and discharged her other duties, with a few additional ones that she had not arranged for in her first plan of labour; and then she sat down with a much quieter heart to hear Mr. Ashton read over the chapter she had spoken of.

They had hardly begun their lesson—hardly read a dozen verses, when the rattle of an approaching post-chaise was heard; and Maud felt that her long-expected treasures had arrived at last. Why did she not hurry out to meet them; she who knew the way as well as if she could have seen it—who would have gone out so actively to meet the postman, or on some more trifling errand? But now she could not

take a single step towards the door. Her limbs trembled under her as she tried to rise, and she sank back helpless into her seat again. How strange it seemed. She had been watching for them so long and eagerly, and now when they were come, she must be the last to welcome them! The long excitement and suspense had over-tasked her strength.

She heard the noise and bustle in the hall; the interchange of greetings, and words of kindness hurriedly spoken. And then a voice—to her so well known and tender—her mother's voice, asking for "her Maudie—her dear, dear Maudie." The door opened; she felt her mother's arms about her once more, and those long curls drooping over her neck which it pleased her so in earlier days to smooth in her childish fingers. And then she heard another voice beside her, blunt and boyish, saying—

"And I, too, want to kiss my sister Maud."

Poor Maud! the flood of happiness was too strong for her to bear; and when her father stooped to kiss her, her head drooped, and her face grew very pale, for she had fainted.



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CHAPTER XI.

HAPPY DAYS.

"Swift those laughing hours,
On light pinions borne—
Passed, like summer flowers,
Never to return,"—Miss Davis,

HAPPY days indeed those were for Maudie, when all the friends that she loved were gathered round her, and the circle of family affection was complete. How long had it been her daily trouble, that those who were the nearest to her in relationship should be the farthest removed from her in leagues and miles, and that the vast sea should roll its wide waves between them! How long had it formed a part of her morning and evening prayer, that a merciful Providence would preserve her parents and her brother, and bring them in safety home to her! Her heart had been fixed upon two spots in the earth, as the places where her treasure was deposited,that distant home in the Indian city, and this quiet home in pleasant Springfield. Now all

this was over and past; her many prayers were fulfilled; she could concentrate her affection on one spot. All that she loved was now brought near to her, and her cup of happiness was full.

She had to make a new acquaintance, one which it did not cost her much time to make. It was that of a little fellow five years old, who called himself Arty, and claimed from her, with rather boisterous energy, the affection due from a sister to a brother. Maud gained an idea of his personal appearance in her own way. She felt his hair, soft and flaxen, and full of short crisp curls;—his features, they were like mamma's, she thought, except the chin.

"What colour are your eyes of, Arty?"

"My eyes?—oh, they are like yours, sister; I have often heard mamma say so."

"Then they are blue, I suppose."

"Let me look at your eyes, sister."

Maud turned her face towards him, smilingly.

"You don't look at me," he said. "Can't you see with them? Why not? they are wide open. They are not like old Ramahun's, who used to beat the tom-tom at the station; his eyes were shut close up, like mine when I go to sleep."

"My eyes aren't of any use to me, however, Arty; and I never wished that I could use them more than I do just now, when I want to look upon my little brother. But I can feel you, can't I?"

And she took him on her knee, and spanned his sturdy little legs with her fingers, and sang him a simple song which she had loved when she was of the same age. It was no wonder that she soon won her brother's heart, and that wherever she went he followed her.

In due time the luggage arrived from South-ampton, and some little excitement was occasioned in that quiet circle by the display of the stores which the new comers had brought from India with them. Many things had been provided for Maud which were very rich and pretty,—she heard other people admire them, and knew that they must be handsome; but for herself, she was unable to judge of their beauty. That splendid India shawl, which had cost I don't know how much money—the fabric was so fine, and the pattern so rich, and the colours so rare; the commonest merino would have seemed as good to her judgment, though the texture might

have been a little coarser to her touch. She was pleased and grateful, however; for she reckoned these things, not according to their own intrinsic worth, though that was considerable, but as tokens of an affection which she valued above all earthly price, and which was indeed the only thing that made the blind girl love this world, and wish to remain in it. One thing delighted her more than all the rest-it was a collection of shells and skins which was brought to her in Arty's name, and which he called his own present to her. The skin of a tiger, large enough to serve as a quilt, if she had been inclined to use it for that purpose; birds of rare and beautiful plumage, some of them little gaudy creatures scarcely larger than a humble-bee; and valuable shells of various shapes, smoother than marble to the touch, and humming like a monster bell when they were held to the ear. Maud's kind friends at the vicarage were not forgotten either, though I do not remember what presents they all received; but I know that Ellen's heart was made glad by the gift of a shawl very much like Maud's, and whose bright pattern Ellen was better able to appreciate than her friend.

The first week or two passed very happily among the re-united friends at Springfield. If the visitors had brought wonders for Maud's acceptance, she was able also to show them many things which equally surprised them. All the apparatus of "the study" was brought out once more, -the cushion, which had been disused of late, again presented a bristling array of pins' heads; the writing frame, the maps, the French books in raised type, were produced, and Maud explained the mysteries of her early education. She was gratified in showing them what she had done, because they were so pleased at her success; and Mr. Ashton, whose pains and ingenuity had devised the whole, felt himself again, as he had done a hundred times before, amply rewarded for all his anxious trouble. The delighted parents praised both the pupil and the teacher, and these each gave the praise to the other; Maud saying that she couldn't help learning under such a kind master, and Mr. Ashton declaring that a scholar so persevering and patient would have done well under any circumstances. They continued talking the subject over after Maud had left the room.

"She is almost as far advanced as most girls of her age who do not suffer from the same infirmity," Mr. Ashton said, "and what she has learned she will always remember, for her mind never lets anything slip that it has once admitted."

"She will not have lost much time in that respect," Mr. Summers answered, "if it should please Providence to give her the blessing of sight. She will only have to learn on a new principle, which she will soon get hold of."

"You still intend to try the effect of the ope-

ration, I suppose?"

"Yes, as there seems to be some hope in it. If it fails, she will not be in any worse condition than at present; and if it succeeds, what an unknown blessing it will be to her! Yes, we must try it—and the sooner the better."

"I dread it rather on account of her health," said Mrs. Summers; "she seems so delicate and excitable. Has she said much to you about the operation, papa? Do you think she is fearful of it?"

"She has seldom mentioned the subject to me of her own accord, but whenever I have spoken to her of it, she always seemed to meet the thought of it bravely. And I don't think she would flinch from anything if she thought it needful, or looked upon it as her duty to go through it."

"I believe the operation is not so painful in itself as one might suppose," said Mr. Summers, "yet it seems fearful enough to think about.

The eye is such a delicate organ."

"What are you going to do with sister Maud?" broke in the eager voice of little Arthur, who had been listening with open ears, while the others had forgotten his presence.

"Oh, we are going to try whether we cannot have her eyes altered, Arty; so that she will be able to see what you are like, little boy," said Mrs. Summers, taking his hand to lead him out of the room.

"Mind you don't hurt her then, mamma; because I love Maud, and don't want any one to hurt her."

Mr. Summers sought Maud out, and proposed to take a walk with her, wishing to mention the subject to her, and find out how she felt respecting it. When they had got into the fields, he began:—

"Maud, dearest, I shall have to go to London in a few days. I have a great deal of business to settle there, and shall have to spend some weeks in town. Mamma does not care about going just now, and Arthur will remain at Springfield with her. Perhaps your grandpapa may join us. What do you think-would you like to come too?"

"If you would wish me to go, papa, it will please me very much. Not that I like London, it is so noisy and bustling, so different to this quiet village here."

"We have a particular reason for wishing you

to go with us, Maud."

"I thought so, papa. You wish to take me to

Dr. Pirie's again, do you not?"
"Yes, my child. Your grandpapa is wishful, and so are we, that he should try his skill upon you, and see if he cannot do something to give you your sight. You will have to go through an operation, a very simple one, though it may give you some pain. Many thousands have been relieved from blindness by this means, and we are full of hope that it may be the same in your case, Maudie, and that you may yet be able to see."

"Grandpapa has talked to me about it many times, and I am quite ready to try it whenever you think best, papa."

"You are not afraid of it then, Maudie?"

"I am not so brave as some people, you know; but I hope I shall have courage enough to bear this. At all events, I am willing to try."

"It gives me great pleasure to find you so willing, my dear. It's not a very cheerful subject for you, and so we wont talk about it any more till it is necessary. But there is one thing I must say to you, which your grandpapa has often told you before, I have no doubt. We believe in one great Being, who is the source of strength; who observes every trial that comes upon us; and who will give us the power to bear it with firmness, if we only ask it of Him rightly."

Mr. Summers then changed the subject of the conversation. Maud was glad that he had mentioned this to her;—she had been wanting him to do so ever since they came home. And, now that it was settled, she determined to take it as bravely as she could. And she made up her mind also, that, if she could possibly help it, she

would not allow the thought of what was coming to interfere with her happiness during the few days that would intervene before their journey to London. A few words with her mother on the subject—cheerful and hoping words—and then, as if by common consent, nothing more was said. Mand couldn't help thinking about it, of course; but, like a wise girl, she tried to think about it in its brightest aspect only.

The only vacant place in her circle of friends was now filled up by the arrival of Henry Ansted, who had been away for some time with his private tutor, and now came home for a week or two before returning to college. Henry threw up his books and studies entirely for the time, and entered with a good will into all sorts of romps and ruralizing. Once more the old chesnut-tree in the orchard swayed to and fro to the motion of a swing, put up professedly for the benefit of little Arthur, but which, when once put up, was quite as often used by the others. Maud was almost surprised to find herself seated in it one morning, and sweeping breathlessly through the air, with Henry laughing near, and Ellen giving her most violent pushes. Very different she looked now, Henry said, to the little creature which she was when he had first lifted her into that swing; and when they had to stand on each side, and swing her very gently, because she was so fearful.

"But we have all altered very much since that time," said Henry, rather complacently; being not unmindful of his present honourable position.

Everyday brought some fresh plan of pleasure, and between these and her duties, of which she did not lose sight all this time, Maud's attention was so fully occupied that she had no leisure to feel dull. The last day came at length, however-too soon, as most of them felt -and they were to start for London the next morning. That last evening was spent at the vicarage in a sort of family-gathering. It was as pleasant as the most devoted friendship could make it; and yet there seemed to be a little check upon their pleasure, for everybody there knew of the trial which awaited Maud, and everybody sympathized with her in their hearts. She did not appear less cheerful than usual herself, and joined in their amusements with as much readiness as she was accustomed to show.

At the close of the evening, when Mr. Ansted bade her good-bye, he said, placing a strong emphasis on one word—

"We hope you will soon be back in Spring-field, Maud, among your old friends. And be sure that you come to see us, first of all."

CHAPTER XII.

THE TIME OF TROUBLE.

"Sustain me, Lord, and let me neither shrink,
Nor scorn the rod of painful discipline:
The cup my Father gives me, I would drink,
And bend my will submissively to Thine."
THE DOVE ON THE CROSS.

Busy, bustling, noisy London. How it jarred upon Maud's nerves after the calmness and quiet of her village-home. How close and oppressive seemed the atmosphere, so full of smoke and dust, and so hot and stale to breathe. Yet they had taken rooms in what was called a pleasant part of town, where the streets were broad and open, and where the wind stirred among the branches of a few trees (already leafless), and where there was a park near at hand, in which Maud rode or walked with Mr. Ashton every day. But she would very soon get tired of this, she was sure.

Dr. Pirie examined her eyes. He thought the probabilities were in favour of a successful operation, but recommended that it should be

delayed for a month or so on account of her general health, which he considered far from good. She had taken a slight cold in her journey, and this was followed by a return of the cough which had troubled her so much the winter before. Dr. Pirie thought it best to wait till this had subsided. Meanwhile she was to live quietly, and take gentle exercise every day. This interval was a weary time for poor Maud. Her papa was absent from her on business for the greater part of each day, and she was left once more to the care of her old and well-tried friend, Mr. Ashton. He was her guide in their short walks in the park, or along the crowded streets; though the latter, so full of interest to most young people, had no attraction for Maud. She often wondered whether any blind persons could ever find their way alone in this wilderness of streets. In such a place as Springfield, the thing was easy; but here, -could it ever be done? One day she passed a man standing at the sunny corner of the street, selling lucifers. He had a dog for his guide, which led him to that place every morning, lay at his feet all day, and led him back home at night. The man

leaned against a house, and cried out every minute, in a high, drawling tone—

"Please to lay out a ha'penny with the poor blind."

He kept tapping with his stick on the pavement, and shifting from one foot to the other; and he had got so accustomed to saying these words over and over again, that he had set them to a kind of tune, and never varied a note. Maud was much interested in this man, and often wished to go that way again; and she never failed to find out the tin hat which the man held before him, and drop therein some little token of her sympathy with him. He had been able to see once, he said, so that he knew what light was, and what colour was, and how the earth and the skies appeared. He had lost his sight by an accident, and nothing could restore it again. Maud had never known that precious gift, but perhaps it might be given her soon; so that she was better off, even in this respect, she thought, than he.

The day fixed for the operation drew near, and Maud was removed the evening before to apartments in a large square in the very heart of

the city, that she might be close to her medical attendant. She got up the next morning with a painful throbbing at her heart, and a sensation as if some heavy burden were pressing her down. Her manner was as quiet as usual, and yet she felt such an unnatural excitement that the slightest sound caused her pain, and every movement in the room was like a wound to her. That everlasting rattle at the front-though dulled by distance and thick walls-what agony it gave her! When it was almost time, she went to her own room, locked herself in, and falling on her knees, she prayed to that great God who is full of love and pity, to give her strength in this time of extremity, and if it were His will, to make the means successful. Then she thought of One who lived as our pattern in suffering and endurance,-how He drew near to His heaviest trial, and how He prayed, "Father, not my will, but thine, be done." And she went forth with her burden greatly lightened, and her heart throbbing much less wildly; ready to face her trouble with a brave spirit, and to bear it, if she could, without a cry.

"Good morning, my dear," said Dr. Pirie's

brisk and cheerful voice, as he took her hand, and led her into the room where the operation was to take place. "You look as if you had slept well. Have you had any return of your cough?"

"No, sir; I have slept very quietly, thank

you."

"So, so; very good. Well, don't be frightened,—we sha'n't hurt you much,—very soon get this over. You aren't afraid of it, are you?"

"No, sir; I am not."

"Well, I want you to sit down here for a little time, while I examine your eyes."

He seated her on a couch, and told her to lie back on some cushions.

She heard the clicking sound of the instruments as he arranged them on the table, and it made her wish that it was over. A whisper from Dr. Pirie was answered in a voice which she did not know, and she became aware that there were strangers in the room.

"Grandpapa!"

"Yes, my child."

"Are you here? And is papa here?"

"He has gone out for a few minutes, but he will come back soon."

Mr. Summers could not trust himself to witness the operation, and had left the room; but grandpapa remained.

"Grandpapa! come here, and let me take

your hand."

"Ah, do," said Dr. Pirie, "you wont be in our way."

So Mr. Ashton sat down on the couch near

her, and took her hand in his.

"Who are these people here besides Dr. Pirie, grandpapa?" whispered Maud.

"Only two assistants."

"Oh," she replied, with a sigh of relief. She did not want to have many people there.

"Now, hold your head quite still," Dr. Pirie said; "there, just in that position. Another

cushion here, please. That's right."

Maud felt her right eye drawn open to its widest extent, and held so by the pressure of

several fingers.

"Now, I shall first have to put something in your eye which will feel very hot; but you mustn't mind that. It's necessary, you know, to prepare it for what I have to do to it." Maud's breath came very quickly, and her heart beat very fast. But she lay quite motionless, and pressed her lips together as tightly as she could.

A few seconds passed, and everything was quite silent. Dr. Pirie's watch was ticking close to her ear, and even its slight sound was very painful to her in that moment of suspense.

Suddenly a sharp piercing pain started in her eye; it seemed to dart through her whole body. Her lips parted as if to utter an exclamation; but it died away before it came to them, and she only tightened her clasp of Mr. Ashton's hand.

Oh, it was a hot pain indeed! And was this only the beginning? Maud wondered in a bewildered way when the operation itself would take place; but she could not ask Dr. Pirie, and so she lay quiet, as before.

"Very good," said Dr. Pirie, "we shall manage this very well, I'm sure. You are quite a heroine, my dear. What—a little faint, eh? Give me the smelling-salts, Mr. Saunders."

Maud soon revived again, and Dr. Pirie changed her position on the couch, to enable him to reach the left eye. She thought he would have

finished his treatment of this before he began the other; but he knew best, to be sure. Oh, the thousands of thoughts that passed through her mind in those few moments—as if the plans, and speculations, and wonderments of a month had all been crowded into that small space of time!

The same process was gone through in the case of the left eye—the same sharp pain, though it was not 'quite so acute as before, she thought, perhaps because her sense of it was dulled.

"Well, how do you feel now, young lady?" inquired the doctor, holding the smelling-bottle

to her nose.

"Better now, sir, thank you."

"You'll be better still presently, when you've taken this. Drink it, will you? So, so; very good. You've borne it capitally well; I don't think I ever had such a quiet patient."

"Will it soon be over, Dr. Pirie?"

"Over, my dear; what over?"

"The operation, sir."

"The operation is over; and you've nothing now to do but to get well as soon as you can."

And he began to talk to Mr. Ashton.

It was over—it was over! That was all that Maud could hear or think about just then. Over! and she had fancied it was just beginning. That was the operation, then; that "hot pain," as Dr. Pirie had called it, and which she thought was only to prepare the eye for something worse to come. Oh, how pleasant to think that it was all done! How thankful she was, and how light her heart felt compared with the feeling of that morning! Mr. Ashton's voice sounded soft and welcome; his loving kiss came like balm to her hot brow; and soon the very noise and rattle in the street seemed to melt into something like dreamy music, and then it all died gently away, and she fell into a sound slumber.

Maud lay in her bed for several days, and except a slight tenderness, she felt no particular pain in her eyes. She was very, very weak, for her strength had been quite exhausted in meeting the operation. She didn't take much notice of what was passing in the room, for she felt inclined to doze. But Mr. Ashton was there all day, she knew, and often at night also; and when she spoke, it was generally to call him by name,

as if to be sure that he was there. Her papa was with her a great deal too, she knew that also; as much as he could be, when he had so much business to attend to. Some one else, too, was there -a stranger, and a woman, as she could tell by her tread, and by the rustling of her dress-a nurse of Dr. Pirie's, Mr. Ashton said, and Maud thanked her in her heart, for she was very kind and gentle. Why wasn't it mamma, or Mrs. Jackson, she thought, if she wanted a nurse at all? And then, answering herself, she thought again, perhaps it was because this person understood such matters thoroughly, and had often had to do with them; and because it was better that they should not see her till her eyes were quite well, if they were going to get well.

Then her eyes began to burn, and feel very painful, and she got feverish and restless. Dr. Pirie came, undid the covering, examined them carefully, and made some application, which put her to still greater pain for the time. Then he tied them up again, and went away; and she heard him talking to Mr. Ashton in the next room. They talked for a long time; this made her fear that her eyes were not going on favour-

ably, and she wished to know what Dr. Pirie thought.

"He did not say a word to me, grandpapa; and I think he shook his head when he took off the plaster. What is his opinion about it?—tell me, do."

"He doesn't know what to think, my dear. Things are not quite so favourable as they appeared at first, but all may be well yet. Sometimes recovery is very tedious after these operations. Any way, Maud, it will be for the best, you know."

"Yes, grandpapa, I know it very well. How many times in the last day or two I have thought of that pretty verse from one of Ellen Ansted's Sunday songs,—one that you used to like so

much:-

"". Though dark my path, and sad my lot,
Let me be still, and murmur not,
But breathe the prayer divinely taught,—
Thy will be done.""

Her eyes grew worse still—more painful and burning. The bandages were loosened, and some leeches applied round each eye. Poor Maud! the day when they were put on was her birthday, and it awoke sad thoughts in her mind of the difference between this and the last occurrence of that day. No presents for her to-day,—it was not a fit time to receive them. Mr. Ashton came and kissed her, and said it was her birthday, but he could not wish her many returns of it, when it was a time of such pain to her; and she felt some tears drop down upon her face as he bent over it. Different indeed to the last; the white muslin dress and the wreath of flowers. and around her pleasant company, and music, and merry voices, and hope; and now here she is, full of pain and heated with fever, and her brow covered with blood, and the hope getting very faint indeed that she will ever be able to Maud grew wandering and light-headed towards night, with the pain and the opiates together; and her thoughts seemed to be running very much upon her birthday of last year, crying out with joy at some fancied present, thanking people for their good wishes, starting up in bed to listen to the music which she imagined that some one in the room was playing, and sometimes singing herself a few inarticulate words. It was a sad suffering time for her, poor thing; and a sad time also for her friends, who saw her trouble, and yet could give her no relief.

After that, something began to pour out from her swollen eyes, and the pain gradually declined. More and more of it came,—the strained eyeballs grew smaller,—she felt great relief. Dr. Pirie washed the lids with some cooling lotion, and told her to keep quiet—she would soon be able to go home now. But would she be able to see,—that was what Maud wondered.

Mr. Ashton came to her bedside shortly after he had gone.

"How do your eyes feel now, Maudie?"

"Better now, grandpapa, thank you—much better. What does Dr. Pirie say about them?"

"You really wish to know, my dear?"

"Yes."

"You will not think it unkind if I tell you the truth?"

"Unkind? No, not in you."

"You have been wishing very much to have your sight, Maudie?"

"Yes, I have wished it, and you and my parents have wished it; but God knows best, grandpapa."

"He does, and He will give you strength to bear what I have to tell you. You wonder what this is that is running down your cheek?"

"Yes, grandpapa."

"It is your eyes wasting away, my poor dear child, and there is no hope now that you will ever see."

" No hope at all?"

"None—the operation has failed."

small be special a warming

Mr. Ashton sank down in a chair, and sobbed like a little child.

CHAPTER XIII.

SEASIDE LESSONS.

"Thou art sounding on, thou mighty sea, for ever and the same,
The ancient rocks yet ring to thee, whose thunders nought can tame,"
Mus. HEMANS.

It was a sorrowful day for her friends at Springfield when Maud came back to them, more sightless than ever. For, before the operation, she had been able to distinguish light from darkness, though lately it had been increasingly difficult for her to do so; but now all was a perfect blank to her, and the hope of restoration was for ever taken away. She felt the disappointment severely, as was very natural; but she did not appear to feel it so keenly as the others. It had been as much on their account as for her own sake, that she had desired to be able to see. Never having known the blessing of vision, she was not so anxious as she would otherwise have been to gain it; and they who felt how great was the privation which she suffered without it, mourned even more than she did when it was

certain she could never possess that gift. They suppressed their feelings in her presence, however; all except Mrs. Jackson, who could not control the expression of her sorrow. She had hoped great things from this operation, and was for a time quite inconsolable at its failure.

"To think," she said, as she sat sobbing in the kitchen,—"to think that after all that sufferin', she should come back to us in a worse condition than she went in. And to wind round my heart as she has, till I've got to love her as if she had bin my own lost Sally; and then to think that she must live and die, and never see me. And she to bear it all like an angel as she is—oh, too good—too good, I say, for this wicked world."

Poor little Arty, too; there was a mystery in the matter which sadly puzzled him. He came to see her on the morning after her arrival, and drew her arm around his neck.

"Sister Maud, they told me that you were going away to have your eyes altered, and when you came back again, they said you would be able to see me."

"Yes, Arty; we all hoped it would be so, but you see our hopes are disappointed."

"Open your eyes then, sister, like they were before; I liked to see them so best."

"They are shut up close now, my dear, and I shall never be able to open them any more."

Arthur remained silent a little while, thinking.

"I don't like it at all, Maudie; why shouldn't you be able to see as well as other people? I can see, and Mrs. Jackson can see, and we can

all see, except you."

"My dear, God knows best what is good for us, and He has some very wise reason, if I only knew it, why He has kept my sight from me. What a many pleasant things He has given me instead of it; you, my little brother, and our kind parents and grandpapa, and many earthly friends and comforts that other people have not got. It would be wrong and wicked for me to complain and say that I did not like it. Shall I say a little verse to you, Arthur, out of a hymn that I thought a great deal about when I was away from you?—

"' Though dark my path, and sad my lot,
Let me be still, and murmur not,
But breathe the prayer divinely taught,—
Thy will be done.'

"My path will always be dark now, Arty, as

long as I live; but I must try to be still, and not to murmur."

The cause of the failure, Dr. Pirie stated, was the extreme weakness of her constitution, and the tendency to disease of the chest which she had always felt, and which had shown itself more clearly of late. One thought burdened Mr. Ashton's mind very much at first-the thought that it was on his account that the operation was delayed. If it had only been performed when Maud first came home, would it not have been much more likely to be successful? But Dr. Pirie said in all probability the issue would have been the same. He advised them to take great care of her health during the winter; and, as soon as the weather was sufficiently mild, to give her the benefit of a change of air. He did not wish to frighten them-there was no actual disease at present, as far as he could judge; but, taking into consideration her weakness and extreme nervous sensibility, and the depressive effects of the late operation, this was his serious advice.

So said Dr. Pirie, and Maud came home a greater invalid than she went away. And as

the cold weather began shortly after her return, she soon became almost a prisoner to the house. No more rambles with Bustle, which she regretted all the more because of her playful, high-spirited little brother, whose company would have made her walks so pleasant, and between whom and the dog a very close friendship was established. Farewell for a long time to all her village visitations; her friendly ministrations were limited to what she could do at home. Her class, too, at the Sunday-school; she had only taken it once after her return, and then her friends expressed their wish that she should give it up. She felt this separation from her village pupils very deeply; she had become greatly attached to her class, and her labours there were among her most pleasant recollections. But it was all laid aside now; and, with all her earnest desires to be employed in something good and useful, she was obliged to remain inactive, because she was too weak to labour. What comfort it gave her then to think that she had done something while she was able to work, though, as she fancied, it had been very little. What pleasure it was to her to know, that many hearts in Springfield thought kindly about her, and many people asked lovingly after her, whom she would not have known if she had not tried to do them good. She had wished that everybody in the place might love her, and it seemed as if everybody did. Even some of those bad ones, whom one may find in every town and village, who appear proof against human feeling, and never soften towards any one—even they unbent towards her, and said or did something to show their good will. Lawrence Lee, the drunken cobbler, stopped Weeks one day in the street, and asked after her health, and said how they missed her in the village.

"Nobody never said such things to me afore," said he, "not even an upgrown person, let alone a child. She had a gift that way, to be sure."

I am afraid Lawrence had not profited much by Maud's lessons, for, to use Weeks's words to Maud, he was rather "disguised in liquor" even then. But it was something for him to remember what had been told him. He carried the seed of good things about in his mind, and perhaps it might spring up and flourish some day.

In spite of all precautions, the winter brought on another severe cough, which increased upon her day by day. Medical advice appeared of no use, and all the things which Mrs. Jackson anxiously sought out from among her remedies failed to cure it, or even to give her much relief. All day long, and often all night too, it racked and shook her poor weak body, till she became so thin, that there seemed little substance left for that consuming cough to prey upon. Now her friends grew more anxious than ever, for all could see that her health was rapidly failing. During the latter part of the winter she kept her own room, little Arty being her almost constant companion, listening to all that she said with the most eager attention, and carefully treasuring up in his heart the scraps of poetry and stories which she told him. Her friend and companion, Ellen Ansted, was a frequent visitor also during the early part of the winter, and then she left Springfield for a few weeks on a visit. But Mr. Ansted often came, and brought messages from her, and talked with Maud about her friends in the

parish, especially the ill and infirm among them. Those visits were very pleasing to the sick girl, for Mr. Ansted's manner was so kind and gentle, and one felt that every word he said came from a loving heart. He taught lessons of good without seeming to teach—without putting on the formal character of an instructor. So Maud looked forward to his coming as one of the cheering circumstances which lightened the burden, and broke in upon the loneliness of that winter of sickness. For while he sat beside her, and talked so frankly and cheerfully of the things which she loved to hear, she gathered from his lips, almost without knowing it, more and more of that holy knowledge which teaches us the way to a useful life, and, better still, the way to a happy death.

But the long winter came to an end at last; and as soon as the spring was far enough advanced, her friends removed her to the seaside, to a sheltered watering-place, where the air was generally milder than at other parts. For a short time this change produced a very favourable effect upon her health—she regained a portion of her former vigour, and was able to

take long walks upon the sands, with some friend's arm to lean upon. Ellen joined them when they had been there a few weeks, and Maud felt some of the old delightful feelings return-such as they used to share in their former rambles in the fields and woods, and by the dear old beech-tree at Broadlands. It was almost as good now to stroll upon the beach and listen to the even swell of the waves, or sit on the rocks further on, beneath the cliff, and hear the waters surge more harshly in and out among them,-almost as good, if it had not been that Maud had changed so greatly. Little as the blind girl knew about the world, she felt that it must be a beautiful one; and, for many reasons, the thought of leaving it was sad to her. There was the warm, life-giving sun shining down upon her, making the air so cheerful, and inspiring energy into everything about her;there was music in the world, more than most people would dream of; for most people are too busily engaged in looking at the world, to listen to its secret melodies. Maud could not see the beauty, and so her ears were more alive to catch the sweet sounds which nature's movements are

always making. And at this time, especially, her senses appeared to be unnaturally quickened, as if she found increasing beauty in the world, now that she was soon to quit it. The sighing of the wind, the pattering of the shower, the foliage stirring in the trees-all such things gave her great delight; this was God's music, she said; the gentle tones of it, not so grand and awful as the thunder-peal or the crashing storm, but soft and comforting, reminding us that He could do small things as well as greatthat He who made the world could speak gently even to the trembling infant's soul. Those rolling waters, too-how many different songs they had to sing her: never would she have grown weary of listening to them, for that which always seemed the same to others, was, morning, noon, and night, fresh melody to her.

Thinking it might add something to the few sources of pleasure which she possessed, Mr. Summers caused an Æolian harp to be constructed, to fit the sill of the window outside their sitting-room; and in the evening, when the cool breeze came breathing in from the sea, they sat with the window open, and listened to

its plaintive tones. Maud appeared to derive the most exquisite enjoyment from this,—lying back upon the couch, with her features composed as if in a pleasant dream; drinking in the sweet sounds, which changed with every modulation of the wind, as though her soul had been wrapt away from earth, and that simple music had spoken to her of the music of a better world.

Maud knew that people noticed her, and that even strangers felt kindly towards her; for she sometimes overheard expressions of sympathy and interest from them, as they passed her in her short walks, now growing shorter every day. Perhaps they were here, too, like herself (she thought), in search of better health, or to lengthen out a life that was apparently drawing near to its close; and yet they had feeling to spare for others-their own troubles did not take up all their attention. It was a kind world too, she thought, as well as beautiful; or, at least, she had always found it so. Yes, even in the worst people she had ever known, she had always met with something which made her glad to think she had known them. A kind world indeed it was, or why should these people who had never

seen her before, and who did not even know her name, say as they went past her, "Poor thing! she is not long for this world"—and other words, kinder and more pitying still? And what should have moved that stranger lady with the gentle voice, who came and sat beside her on the beach one day, to ask so tenderly about her health, and afterwards to send that basket of delicious grapes home for her! What, indeed, if there were not much kindness here, and many worthy feelings, even though, upon the whole, it might be a wicked world! But, indeed, few people could have looked upon Maud without emotion; for her always pleasing countenance seemed now to be clothed with a beauty that was quite unearthly; and those blind eyes, sealed up in darkness, drew much more of pity from observers than the most perfect orbs would have drawn of admiration. Her long fair hair, drooping round a face on which disease had placed its delicate but deadly flush; her features, bearing too evident tokens of her premature decay, and yet lit up by a cheerful smile, as if her soul were peaceful within her amidst it all;—few could have seen her thus with hearts unmoved.

As the summer heats increased, Maud grew weaker, and at last her walks were abandoned altogether. Sometimes in the cool evening they got her into a wheeled chair, and she was drawn along the sands towards the rocks, to a spot that she particularly loved. One evening Mr. Ashton was her only companion, and Maud, as she was wont, talked out her thoughts to him. On some things she could converse more freely with him than even with her parents,—she had been so much under his guidance just at that time when we receive impressions most readily, and he had taught her many of those deep truths which belong to another life.

It was a still, quiet evening, and yet those restless waves were at their busy work amongst the rocks, low down at the base, pouring through and through the thousand archways that they had worn in the stones with their long labour.

"How wonderful that the waves should be always like this, grandpapa,—never standing quiet—never settling down quite still!"

"Wonderful indeed, Maud; and yet that motion, like everything else in God's world, is for good, answering a wise purpose." "The sea is a beautiful thing, is it not?—a grand thing—grander than the land, is it not?"
"Indeed it is."

"I have often heard it said that the sea is like eternity, because it is so vast and unbounded."

"Yes, Maud, there is a poem which begins-

" Emblem of eternity, Unbeginning—endless sea."

"Then I want to ask you a question, grandpapa. There are several descriptions in the Bible, I remember, of what heaven is like. They tell us of many things that we are accustomed to here, which will not be found in heaven. And the sea is one of them: we are told that there shall be no more sea. Now, the sea is such a beautiful thing, and such a useful thing—how is it, then, that we are told so particularly that there will be no such thing in heaven?"

"Your question is a hard one, Maudie: there are a great many things in the Bible, and especially on that subject, that we can't understand. We are not to take it all literally, you know; we are not to think that it will be just exactly as it is described there. Some of these accounts may

be only figurative—intended to give us a little idea of what we couldn't fully understand now. And perhaps this is one of them,—perhaps it doesn't mean that there will be, in reality, no sea in heaven; but it may mean that there will be no trouble, no tempest, no change there, and the sea is the emblem of these things. We read that there are living fountains of water there, and St. John heard a sound in heaven like the voice of many waters. But there will be nothing unquiet or turbulent there, to break in upon the universal peace."

"No trouble, no sorrow; these are the things meant then," said Maud, musingly. "I feel, grandpapa, that if it were not wrong, I should like to think that there is sea in heaven."

"Whatever can help to increase our happiness there, be sure that God will provide it for us, my dear child; and if it is not there, be sure that we shall never want it. But we are told in the book of Revelation that the Apostle saw in one of his visions a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who had overcome in their battle with the world, stood upon the sea of glass, having the harps of God. What that means I cannot

tell; but, no doubt, it is some great and happy triumph, too glorious for us to understand in this life. Perhaps, Maudie, before long, you and I may be counted worthy to stand upon that sea."

CHAPTER XIV.

MAUD'S LEAVETAKING.

"She lived and loved, will sorrow say,
By early sorrow tried;
She smiled, and sighed, and passed away,
Her life was but an April day,—
She loved and died."—ELLIOTT.

The hay had all been gathered in long ago, and the labourers in the fields had just begun to cut the golden corn, which bent waving to the wind, when Maud returned to her old home at Springfield. All along the road they told her of the signs of a rich and abundant harvest, and her heart was glad, even though she would want none of its bounty for herself. Propped up by pillows in the corner of the carriage, her thoughts were busy upon another world, more glorious and fruitful still. These pleasant things she was soon to leave; but only to exchange them, as she felt assured, for greener pastures, and waters still more peaceful.

Mrs. Jackson met them at the hall-door, and

took her from the carriage in her strong arms, as if she had been a very infant; carrying her straight upstairs to her own bedroom, for Maud was quite exhausted with the journey.

"And so you've come back again, my dear Miss Maud; and it's very glad we are to see you once more. I hope it's done you good—the

change?"

The question faltered on Mrs. Jackson's lips, as she looked at the wasted form before her, and felt that there could be only one answer.

"Good in some respects, perhaps, thank you, Mrs. Jackson; but not in the way you kindly mean. Do you know what I have come home for?"

"To be with us once again; isn't it so, my dear?"

"Yes, I couldn't bear without coming back to be in my own room again, and with my own old friends about me; and to hear the sound of the church bells again coming across the fields. I wanted that,—there are no bells so sweet anywhere else. I didn't wish to be away at the last; and so I've come home, you see, to —"

"Oh, don't say it, Miss Maud, my own dear

child; don't say it. I can't bear it, indeed I can't. I wanted to keep myself quiet,—if I could,—but to hear you talk in that way—it quite overcomes me."

"But, dear Mrs. Jackson-"

"Please don't say any more just now, dear; don't—I shall be better able to hear you—by-and-bye. I—I didn't think to give way like this."

And Mrs. Jackson left the room dissolved in weeping. No wonder if even Maud shed a few tears at this outburst of affection.

The same old room once more—that in which she had passed the last long, weary winter, in much pain and weakness. Now it was the late summer, and she came back to it weaker than even then, and suffering as much pain. But it was more cheerful to be here now, for the window was open, and the bees were humming without, and the gentle wind was sweeping the leaves of the plants on the sill, and bearing their sweet perfume to her. An old acquaintance, too, was giving her his hoarse greeting from an open wicker cage outside the window, from whence, when he liked to do so, he could hop out on to the ledge, and make his entrance into

the room. Poor starling!—having lost one mistress, he was now about to lose another.

"Better here than at the seaside," said Maud to herself—"better in my own old dwelling, with all its joyful remembrances of happy days. I shall like to go to heaven straight from that home where I have been taught the way thither."

Mr. Ansted was one of the first visitors (many she could not see) who came to inquire after her, and offer her those little attentions which make up all that human love can do to lighten our last burden. The minister's heart was gladdened to find how well she had learned those lessons of godly comfort and resignation which he had tried to set before her, and how ripe she was for that heavenly garner into which the Lord of the harvest was about to gather her. Even he, experienced as he was, felt that he could be taught by her,—that the great Teacher had given her deep instruction in the sacred truths of eternity. All that he could do was to share in her joyful expectation; and talk with her of those glorious things which were ever present to her mind.

There was one anxiety on which she dwelt

much: she had wished greatly to meet the girls who had formed her class at the Sunday-school, and to talk with them once more. They had all been kind and respectful in their manner towards her; some of them had shown great interest in her health, and had been several times to the house during her absence to inquire after her. They nearly all bade fairly, Maud thought; but they were young and light-hearted, and might soon forget what she had tried to teach them in the class. Perhaps if she could see them now, and say a little to each one of them, they would be more likely to remember it when her death had sealed her words. As she thought much upon this, and often mentioned it, her friends judged it best to gratify her desire; and one day, when she felt a little less weak than usual, she had them all in, and gathered them in a class around her bed. Most of them brought flowers for her, or some of the ripest fruit from their gardens, or some other little token of affection, which no one knew better than Maud how to prize. This was their last meeting,—they all felt that,-they all knew that they would see her face no more. She spoke a very few words to

them, but they were loving words; solemn, because they were spoken by one who was now passing into death, and yet cheerful, as the greeting of the long-absent traveller when he is just coming within sight of his home. And then she called them separately to her side, and said a word or two to each one of them, and gave to each some little parting present to keep in remembrance of their teacher, now that she was going from them. Every eye was swimming, and every voice failed but that of her who was dying; and that, though very low, was even and placid as it used to be when she talked to them in days gone by. What power and eloquence there was in those few plain words, and how they sank into the hearts of those who heard them! Perhaps no priestly sermon, preached from a pulpit in all due form, could have had such an effect on the simple minds of those little villagegirls.

And now the end drew rapidly near. They all saw that the silver cord of life, drawn out in her case to the very slenderest thread, would soon part asunder and let her go free. She felt it, and her mind was peaceful at the thought.

The fits of fainting, which had been gradually increasing in strength, became so frequent now, and lasted so long, that several times, as she lay breathless and insensible, her friends thought that she had passed away from them. And yet day after day she lived on, if that can be called life which is so very near to death. One afternoon, as she lay exhausted after a long attack of coughing, she heard a slight whining noise in the room beside her; and putting forth her hand, poor Bustle leaped at once upon the bed, and lay quietly down near her.

"Poor Bustle!—so you have come to wish me good-bye. Poor Bustle!-we have had many pleasant walks together, have we not? We shall not have any more now. Be a good faithful dog

to your little master. Arty-Arty."

Arty was seldom far off from her bedside now. "Take care of Bustle, Arty; -I was very fond of him. Love him, for my sake."

The poor animal seemed to understand that something sad was going on, and whined to express his sorrow, till Mrs. Jackson, fearing it would distress her, removed him from the room.

The next day, about sunset, the last living

change passed over her features,-that change which is the token of the closing struggle at hand. She knew that it was coming; she had known it before. Mr. and Mrs. Ansted had been with her that morning,-she had taken a solemn leave of them, and had sent for Ellen to speak her last farewell to her. Henry was away at his duties,-she gave his sister a kind message for him. That was all over then; she had done with all friends without the house; there remained only the loving circle here for the last leavetaking of all. And now she gathered them all together, and they stood silent and weeping about her bed, and the setting sun poured its rich rays through the open window, falling upon that marble face, and surrounding it with a kind of glory. She lay silent for a time, gathering all her strength for this last scene, and then spoke in a low, clear voice-

"You are all here about me, my dear, dear friends? You are the nearest and dearest to me in the world. I am going away now. I must not stay any longer. I want to kiss you all, and to say good-bye. Only for a little while—only for a little while. You can come to me to the new home—the happy home where I am going

to—and then we can all meet together again—and make up one united family—and never be divided any more. I shall not be blind there—I shall be able to see you all. Something said to me just now that the glory will be all the brighter to me, because, when I see it, my eyes will be opened—for the first time. I shall see you all there—" And she repeated, half-singing, the words—

"Where dwells the light which hath no night, And where no eye is blind."

Then the room was silent for a long, long time. The sun had gone down, and the air was very close. The window was thrown wide open, and yet no coolness seemed to enter. Even the leaves of the trees were still; and the dial upon the table kept on its swift, swift ticking, as if it were hurrying on the last moment of that death-bed scene.

"Mamma, are you there? Good-bye, mamma; good-bye, papa. You have been very kind to me—if I had lived, I would have shown how much I loved you—we shall meet together again."

"Good-bye, Arty dear. I haven't known you long, my little brother—but I shall know you

better when you come up to our heavenly Father's house above. Be a good boy, Arty; love God—and think about sister Maud when she is gone."

"Good-bye, grandpapa. I owe many good things to you—more than I can tell. Thank you for it all—I shall thank you better by and-bye. Kiss me, all of you—and may God's blessing be upon you."

They stooped down and kissed that placid brow, on which the dews of death were gathering.

"Is there any one else here?"

There was no one else. Mrs. Jackson could not summon sufficient courage to meet this affecting scene, and she had gone out of the room.

Maud sank back in a fainting fit after this last exertion, and lay for a long time as one really dead. A little faint fluttering of the heart was the only token of still remaining life. The evening shadows were drawing rapidly over the sky, and still those anxious watchers kept their place around the bed, waiting till the last dread moment should arrive. The hot oppressive atmosphere was at last relieved by a gentle

breeze which sprang up, and poured its delightful coolness into that silent chamber. So soft and yet so cheering-it might have come with those guardian angels that were standing near, to take dear Maudie's spirit to their own bright home. Music-low and gentle-came to the ears of her mourning friends; only mortal music, however, for it was the breeze sweeping through the strings of the Æolian harp which had been placed in the window. Oh, how fitting for the hour of a happy death! It rose and fell with the passing wind; now dying away in the softest tones, and now swelling like a distant chorus. Maud heard it at last-she had always loved sweet sounds; - or was it really that which she heard, and not the music of another world?

"Hush!" she said, "the harps!—the harps!"

A few moments after, and the hand she had raised drooped downward—the features became fixed in their wondering brightness. Maud had passed away from among the living.

And the Æolian harp went on with its wild music, as if it had a mission to remind those

bereaved ones of heaven.

CHAPTER XV.

THE END OF ALL.

"Ah! me, those youthful bearers, robed in white, They tell a mournful tale."—GRAHAME.

I HEARD the sound of the church bell breaking the silence of the quiet summer afternoon. Not the pleasant chimes which Maud had loved to hear,—not the round peal of joy and festivity, telling of some happy event, or bidding to the holy service of the sanctuary;—but that deep, prolonged sound which tells that the open grave is about to receive a new tenant. Yet, in her case, it could not be called a sound of sorrow.

I thought, as I stood by that churchyard, that there was nothing more affecting than a funeral upon a rich and glorious summer day. To think that while the world was covered with life and joy, and while nature appeared to have put on its most beautiful clothing, we should have to take our dead friend, and lay her in her last resting-place, and leave her there in

darkness,—deep down in the cold ground! To think that the sun would rise again to-morrow, and next day, and shine upon her grave; and that the grass would spring up, and the flowers blossom upon it, and the church bells pour their joyful music near, and people pass and repass, gladdened with these pleasant gifts of God; and all the while, she should lie there cold and insensible,—she who loved these things so well! And yet all this reminded me the more of heaven and immortality; there was no darkness in the region whither she had gone—no death, no parting there—but flowers of life, and fruits of healing, and a sun that never sets, and a landscape of perpetual bloom.

The solemn procession drew near, and entered the churchyard. The coffin was borne by eight young women, dressed in white, the emblem of purity. Flowers, fresh gathered, were scattered on the pall. Behind the mourners, a large number of people from the village followed, many of whom came in their working-dress, having left their labour for a short time to pay this last tribute of respect to one who had been so generally loved.

"I am the resurrection and the life, saith the Lord. He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live, and he that liveth and believeth in me shall never die."

Mr. Ansted could hardly suppress his emotion as he read that beautiful service, and there were few tearless eyes among those who listened to it. And so they laid her in her quiet grave, in a cheerful nook of that green churchyard, where the morning and evening sun could shine upon it, and the shadow of a lime-tree sheltered it in the noon-day. Flowers were planted upon it,not rare and costly, but humble flowers, such as grow in cottage gardens; and the young villagers, when they passed through the ground, would often stop before that grave, and if by chance a nettle or a weed were springing up among the grass, they would pluck it up, as if jealous of the intrusion. A plain cross of granite was set up at its head, bearing the simple inscription-

"MAUD SUMMERS."

And for years, one might be seen there almost daily, to whom it seemed a very holy spot,—

going thither and returning with a step which grew rapidly weaker and more broken, till at length people shook their heads as he passed by, and wondered that the old man lasted so long. Not a great while since he also passed away, and they laid the aged grandsire near to her restingplace whom he had loved so tenderly.

Is there nothing in the record even of a child's life that may do us good? Shall not the remembrance of her fortitude and kindness incite us also to be brave in difficulty and benevolent to all? Shall not the thought of the diligent labour which, in spite of so many drawbacks, she accomplished, and the consistent goodness which marked her daily life, remind us of duties which we may discharge, and show us the beauty and usefulness of a holy example? My youthful reader, there is some work for good that you may do-there is some mission for you to fulfil. It may be one of patient suffering, or brave struggling with opposing circumstances, or uncomplaining obedience, or active labour; but whatever it may be, find it out, and do it faithfully. The world should be the better even for

a child's existence, for God has made nothing in vain. The things that we do in this life are the seeds of our harvest in the future world; and every little grain of true goodness which we scatter now, will spring up rich and fruitful, to load us with glories in the life to come.

THE END.





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